



POSTMODERNIST ALLEGORY :  
The Works of Thomas Pynchon

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by  
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Submitted as a thesis for the degree of M.A. in the Department of  
English, University of Adelaide, February, 1985.

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*awarded 13-8-85*

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## SYNOPSIS

The argument of this thesis is grounded on a number of historicist assumptions which are implicit in the title. I assume firstly that allegory is not, as is generally accepted, a literary style, but in fact a genre, distinguished by a genre-specific plot structure. This structure would therefore cut across the discrete periods of literary history. But secondly I assume that the pressure exerted by changing cultural attitudes towards art, reality and the epistemological relationship between the two has produced a series of historical modifications in this diachronic structure corresponding to the periods of literary history. "Postmodernism" is one such period and "postmodernist allegory" one such generic modification, of which Pynchon's narratives provide significant examples.

The first chapter elaborates these assumptions, beginning with a consideration of literary genres as opposed to styles or modes and of allegoresis as an interpretative method that has generated some confusion about the precise nature of literary allegory. The figural theory of signs provides the context within which the thematic structures that determine the generic plot structure of allegory are discussed. Figuralism is explored in terms of the nature of the allegoric hero and of his quest, the narrative's attitude towards its language and its capacity to produce a revelation of the sacred Other (allos) through the interpretation of a privileged, anterior sacred book: the "pretext". The historical devaluation of the authority of this sacred text brings into focus the problems confronted by modern figuralism: the epistemological scepticism, the shift in the narrative center away from the signs of Truth to those of Evil (the false logos), find a parallel in the now foreshortened allegoric plot: the plot which lacks the grounds to produce a "pretextual" revelation.

Chapter two explicates V in terms of this altered figural mode.

The failure of V to disclose the transcendental signifier of the figura V, can only be assigned to the predominantly demonic or entropic significations of the figura "herself".

The ontological ambiguity of the figura provides a context for the discussion of The Crying of Lot 49. Chapter three attempts to answer the question: when the objects of figural interpretation do not belong to a Providential scheme, but are signs of a force that actively disrupts access to a logos, what are the consequences for the narrative's relationship with its pretextual antecedent? In other words, how is allegory affected when its pretext endorses the disruption of the figural principles on which its quest structure is based?

Given that the figural structure of postmodernist allegory is modified in terms of both its pretext and its figurae, the nature of the postmodernist hero must also be affected. The discussion of Gravity's Rainbow attempts to discover the changes produced in the nature and function of the hero by a plot which culminates in the disclosure of a false logos that has been manifest in a quasi-figural structure of signs.

The conclusion briefly (re)places the narratives within their generic context, remarking that whilst the allegoric plot has been modified through time, neither the response elicited from the reader nor the generic structures which determine this response have changed.

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university and, to the best of my knowledge, no material previously published or written by any other person except where duly acknowledged in the text and bibliography.

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### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

With gratitude I acknowledge the assistance provided throughout the preparation of this thesis by Professor K.K.Ruthven; my supervisor Mr A.Taylor; Professor H.Bogart; and Mr B.Taylor.

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If there is such a thing as the City Sacramental,  
the city as outward and visible sign of inward and  
spiritual illness or health, then there may have  
been, even here, some continuity of sacrament,  
through the terrible surface of May.

Gravity's Rainbow

Beati qui non viderunt et crediderunt.

(Blessed are they that have not seen and have believed)

Piers Plowman



## CHAPTER ONE

### AN ABSTRACT ACCOUNT OF ALLEGORY

Much has been written about modern fiction in general, and Thomas Pynchon in particular, yet very few critics seem to be prepared to move outside the frame of reference provided by the old realism/experimentalism dichotomy in their attempts to determine just what "postmodernism" is. Realism is obviously an inadequate term to describe Pynchon's "project", but the extent of the challenge posed by recent fiction to the conventional concept of realism leaves one with the impression that it is now unable to describe adequately any text; whilst the notion of experimentalism, often defined as anti-realism, still involves the same discredited assumptions about the relationship between art and reality. Together, these terms represent a modal approach to contemporary fiction; that is, an attempt to classify and criticise texts on the basis of their style. Modal criticism attends to the relationships existing between literary traditions and genres, manifest in distinctive styles: irony, satire or the "experimental realism" of the nouveau roman, for example. However, the work of Pynchon, John Barth and Robert Coover, among others, represents a movement away from such a modal orientation, towards the recuperation of literary genres which exist as "sub-categories" of, or structural possibilities within, the broader category of non-realistic form. It is now generally accepted that in Pricksongs and Descants Coover uses the fable form and that Barth's Giles Goat-Boy is "allegorical".<sup>1</sup> Yet there still remains some resistance to the idea of using a generic methodology to approach Pynchon's work: Maureen Quilligan has been the only theorist to include a discussion of The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow in an historical account of allegory as a genre.

The reason for this must be, at least in part, that allegory is a

notoriously ill-defined term, so the notion of a postmodernist allegory only compounds the problem of definition. The historical connotations of this term suggest that allegory has undergone a series of transformations - from Piers Plowman through to Gravity's Rainbow - and, it is my argument, that despite their immediate differences these works do exhibit a sustained allegoric form. It is in this concept of a sustained form that the clearest difference between a genre and a mode lies. A mode has no characteristic structure of action: the definitive quality of satire, for instance, resides in its effect; while comedy, tragedy and allegory are defined by the manner in which their plots unfold. Still, the apparent dissimilarity between allegoric works does seem to contradict the notion of historical continuity and to undermine the adequacy of the term to describe Pynchon's fiction. That is, until it is recognised that such an appearance is common to the histories of all literary genres. Because a genre is both synchronic and diachronic - in the manner of language itself - each new work is both a product of the existing set of generic features and possibilities, and is itself a transformation of them. Each unique text alters the generic system by reading its existing and potential features in a new way. So this initial chapter attempts to define those structural and substantive elements which constitute allegory's generic form, within the context of this seemingly paradoxical process of changing continuity.

It may still be objected, however, that what this process of change has in fact done is transform allegory out of existence; that the term properly describes only those texts written during the medieval and Renaissance periods which are habitually associated with it, as for example The Faerie Queene is, and that any modification of the accepted form locates that work within another genre: one perhaps closely related to allegory but nonetheless other than it. This is the line of argument which, taken to its logical extreme, leads us into the somewhat unwieldy

situation of one-text genres. But the process of historical transformation is not restricted to allegory: comedy and tragedy are also capable of subsuming different formal types while remaining distinctly comic or tragic. In each of these genres the structure of the action or the way in which the plot develops is designed to reveal a characteristic metaphysical orientation. "Metaphysical orientation" is my short-hand term for the complex of attitudes and assumptions which is sometimes loosely referred to as a generic "world-view": the tragic notion of man confronting a universe from which certainty and absolutes have been withdrawn, or the comedic idea of a providentially designed universe. It is the determining ideational force of the genre and its primary function is to provide a directional framework for the reader's response to metaphysical problems and realities. So while the conceptual dimensions of individual texts are responsive to change as accepted ideas about the nature of reality and of literature's relation to it are reformulated, these changes occur within the broader generic orientation which remains stable. Modern "black comedy" may reveal a kind of design that is quite different in agency to that discovered operating in the world of Shakespearean comedy - as the descent of Hymen in As You Like It intimates a form of order that is different to Kurt Vonnegut's disclosure in The Sirens of Titan, that all human history is really a form of message to a stranded space traveller - but still they both share the comedic orientation towards the concept of a purposefully designed universe. Just as black comedy can be seen as a variation of the diachronic structure of comedy, so the modern "drama of the absurd" modifies the basic orientation of tragedy. The structure of action in a "conventional" tragedy is designed to reveal dramatically the conditions under which accepted metaphysical absolutes are withdrawn from a human situation; a situation created by the protagonist's "tragic flaw" and manifest in his choices which direct the action. This structure is

shortened in the modern, existentialist, "drama of the absurd" where the withdrawal of religious certainty is accepted as an accomplished fact, an artistic donnée. Nonetheless, both forms focus upon, and allow us a glimpse into, the same abyss. This compression of the generic plot structure of tragedy is analogous to the way in which some modern writers have adapted the traditional structure of allegory - a point that will be developed later. For the present, it is this traditional structure itself, and the metaphysical orientation it reveals, that must underpin a definition of the genre.

Put very simply, the fundamental concern of allegory, both structural and thematic, is hermeneutic. So the reason for its availability to historical transformation goes beyond the fact that similar genres also exhibit this tendency to change; allegory is particularly susceptible because it is an epistemological form. It is responsive to changes in cultural conceptions of the nature and availability of knowledge. Peter Szondi quotes from Wilhelm Dilthey's essay "The Rise of Hermeneutics" to describe the theory underlying

... the possibility of a universally valid interpretation on the basis of the analysis of understanding ... along with that of inner experience ... (to provide) the indication of the possibility and the limits of a universally valid knowledge.<sup>2</sup>

The three key concepts here, "interpretation", "understanding" and "knowledge" are all subject to redefinition through time, and so, therefore, is allegory. This should not be taken to mean that the transformations of allegory represent some sort of Hegelian or Darwinian evolutionary development, so that a postmodernist allegory comes

closer to formulating a "universally valid interpretation" than does a fourteenth century work. The conceptual dimensions of individual allegories are not related in any such continuous, linear manner. Each text is discrete and culture-specific, while the genre itself is concerned with interpretation in the abstract rather than with particular interpretative systems. Diachronically viewed then, allegory is about the ways in which different interpretative methods, and the kinds of perception represented by them, either can or cannot make available to our "fallen" understandings knowledge of transcendent realities: the "sacred". In its methods and criteria, interpretation inescapably involves value judgement and it is through a process of transvaluation, in which the grounds of understanding are shifted, that the allegoric protagonist approaches true spiritual knowledge. So in Book I of The Faerie Queene, for instance, the Red Cross Knight must discard his chivalric code of values, cease to be a "man of earth" and become a "man of God", before he is able to ascend the Mount of Contemplation and perceive the New Jerusalem. The quest or journey motif which is common to the structure of all narrative allegories establishes this learning process, as it reveals the consecutive, progressive nature of "fallen" understanding and knowledge. But the moral and social concerns that manifest, within the narrative, spiritual and cognitive problems often are mistaken for thematic ends rather than means. It is the need to reform judgement, upon which ethical choice and moral action are based, that gives rise to the central place accorded to interpretation in allegory.

Of course interpretation is primarily a linguistic or textual enterprise; it is assumed in an allegory that knowledge exists in and through the language structures imposed upon experience. Consequently, and as Mary Carruthers observes, it is concerned with

... (the) analysis of words as ambiguous tools

of thought, capable not only of revealing a true cognition but also of generating a corruption of understanding ...<sup>3</sup>

It is through language that we perceive and know truth; but in a "fallen" world language becomes the equivocal medium that expresses the opaque nature of things as they appear to a degenerated spiritual vision. The relationship between all three terms in the process of signification - human understanding, the verbal sign and the signified object - has lost its original clarity. So allegory, through its language, attempts to establish interpretative principles which make it possible to comprehend realities that cannot now be apprehended literally. These include divine intelligences, ideal essences or Platonic Ideas, forces within the human psyche and the temporal "invisibles": the past and future. But allegory also seeks an ultimate reality that exists as a principle informing these, a "transcendental signifier" capable of revealing a true signifying relationship between the word, perceived reality and divinity (the Word). It is this "Word" that forms the "other" (allos) which allegory, as allegoria or "other-speaking", seeks to articulate. The Bible, in the Western allegoric tradition, represents such an interpenetration: it both describes the revelation of God in the flesh and earthly actions of Christ, and is itself, in its language, an expression of this revelation. It is the kind of text that Maureen Quilligan describes as a "pretext", a work that is able to "articulate the sacred" through its language and reveal the way divine authority is made known in the corporeal world.<sup>4</sup> Quilligan uses the term "pretext" to suggest the anteriority of the "sacred" book, and its relation to the allegoric narrative, which is both about interpretation and is itself an interpretation of its pretext. This is a point to which I will return, particularly in connection with the role of the reader

in postmodernist allegory; but it should be noted here that the status of the language of the pretext determines the capacity of the narrative to reestablish a univocal system of signification. For the pretext displays the suprarealist capabilities of a language that assumes that its significance reaches beyond that of an arbitrary system of signs, to name abstractions which exist as real, active universals informed by a divine signifier. The Bible demonstrates the active involvement of God, as the Word, in human affairs which, when perceived and interpreted as a complex system of signs, reveal an inherent figural relationship between human history and the events of Scripture. The figural pattern of allegory is particularly relevant to Pynchon's adaptation of the genre, but it is the figural conception of language, as exemplified by the work of St. Augustine, to take one example, that is basic to all narrative allegories - although it too becomes problematic in later forms.<sup>5</sup>

The perceived world, allegorically conceived, is analogous to a suprarealist system of signs, which as cognitive forms refer beyond themselves to name spiritual realities. Implicit in this conception is the biblical account of creation, of the world created by and so expressing the spoken word of God; basic to it is the belief that language is the medium of God's revelation and the foundation of human understanding of it. God is revealed in true signs, which if properly interpreted will yield knowledge of him, that is true though necessarily partial. Understanding is dependent upon interpretation, upon the assumed relationship between the signifier and the sign, and the sign and its object of reference. These three abstract units of signification correspond to the divine Word, the spoken or written word, and the signified object, respectively. Augustine assumes that a stable and inherent relationship exists between them, established through God's agency and sustained by the conventions of human language. But in

De Trinitate he writes of another word, an "inner word" that is the image of the divine in the soul, formed by the interaction of understanding and will, which together constitute the basis for moral action. Augustine further claims that understanding is, in effect, "caused" by the perception of the sign, through the perception of the revealed divinity that is the significator of all language, and the source of understanding. The correctness or otherwise of understanding is dependent simply upon one's ability to "read" signs. Christ, as the figure of God's revelation, is the archetype of the true sign, and the ultimate significator of language. Human understanding is an image of Christ as the Word, it is the "inner word" formed in the mind. So this fourth element in the process of signification, this "inner word", is central to Augustine's figural conception of language. It is informed by the Word - as an image of the sacred its significator is the Word - and it reveals this relationship in the act of naming, as it is evoked as one of the "signifieds" of the literal word. The word names both an outer object of reference and, if figurally perceived, the sacred power that informs the very process of naming: the Word imaged in the speaker's understanding. The inner word acts also to indicate the truthfulness of words: words are known to be true if they correspond to the image of Truth that resides within the individual soul.<sup>6</sup> The truthful use of language reflects a correct understanding and will, which in turn determine correct moral action, action that displays true knowledge of the revealed Word. Consequently, material signs - events and words - can become the means by which the nature of the invisible is figurally revealed. This is of course an idealised linguistic, interpretative model, which in its relation to allegory represents the "redemption" of a "fallen" language. Yet it also presents a basic epistemological problem: is the perceived figural pattern projected by the mind, or does it actually reside in the nature of reality? While the relevance of this

question to Pynchon's work is readily apparent, it is central to the whole enterprise of allegory: the enquiry into the capacity of language to reveal a true cognition of the sacred and of truth. In Western tradition, the authoritative text for such a figural reading of language and history is the Bible, which in its role as an allegoric pretext lends the authority of a successful precedent to the figural form of the narrative's language and structure.

Typology is the most obvious allegoric device used to incorporate the pretext into the narrative. By drawing fictional events into a relationship with an anterior biblical structure, it is one of allegory's chief interpretative strategies for establishing a continuity between word, event and divine force or intention. But it is here that allegory as a literary genre and allegoresis as a critical method begin to converge. The confusion between these two enterprises has resulted in considerable theoretical misapprehension about the nature of allegory. Both are hermeneutic forms, both are methods of commentary, but in their assumptions and intentions they differ quite radically. An allegoric narrative can be seen as a commentary that reveals the meaning of its pretext by reenacting or rediscovering it, rather than by simply stating it. Allegory seeks, above all, to create in the reader a personal awareness of the significance of the values represented by the pretext, not only knowledge of its meaning. Allegoresis however is entirely concerned with the problem of meaning; it assumes that the meaning of an anterior work has become either unacceptable or inaccessible and so must be retrieved through interpretation. It has frequently been noted that allegoresis developed in response to the threat posed by historical shifts in cultural values to the sacred character of culturally important myths.<sup>7</sup> The allegorical interpreter - the practitioner of allegoresis - assumes that the text "hides" its meaning in an imagistic species of code in order to conceal sacred truths from the vulgar, and

to restrict access to such knowledge to an elite. Consequently, it requires a discursive hermeneutic to reveal its truth; a hermeneutic that aims to validate the content of the sacred work without disturbing its form. This is achieved primarily through the construction of an authorial intention, supposed to be inherent in the text, which accords with both the interpreter's rationale and his contemporaneous cultural values. One of the most often cited examples of this is the allegorisation of Homer by the Stoics who discovered, prefigured in his works, ideas current in their own time. The authority of Homer, whose works held a canonical position in Greek culture, was preserved against charges of frivolity and immorality through the critical revision provided by allegorical interpretation. This method of reviving prior cultural authorities forms, in part, Edwin Honig's theory of allegorical conception. Studies such as Dark Conceit continue a theoretical tradition in which the terminology of allegoresis has been incorporated into the critical lexicon used to describe allegoric narratives. Consequently the construction of an authorial intention, which justifies the interpretative revision of a "sacred" work by allegoresis, gives rise to the notion that literary allegories are motivated by a powerful authorial didacticism. Allegoresis must assume that universal truths, which usually coincide with contemporary cultural beliefs, are both knowable and known; so the ideas expressed by the work are already known, and the critic has only to reveal them.<sup>8</sup> The work is treated as an expression of some independent system of ideas, a referential code that is chosen quite arbitrarily in relation to the work. But the allegorical critic objectifies this arbitrary relation by invoking the concept of authorial intention, which prefigures or anticipates these extra-textual ideas.

When the terms belonging to allegoresis are removed from their specific context and transferred to the practical criticism of individ-

ual allegoric texts, they both suggest and support a model of narrative allegory as a pre-determined and prescriptive form. It is seen as a rhetorical device used to sustain a system of beliefs - in the manner of an allegorised "sacred" work - or used to test and prove the efficacy of moral ideals in relation to social realities. Gay Clifford, in her book The Transformations of Allegory, terms this latter purpose "exploratory didacticism".<sup>9</sup> But it is not "exploratory" at all; in this view of allegory the pretense of exploration disguises the fact that the allegorist already knows his thematic destination; namely, the valorization of one "hierarchy" of value or code of conduct and the corresponding devaluation of all others. Her phrase is a euphemistic way of asserting that allegory is an ideological and conservative form. This notion attributes to the author the same assumptions as does allegoresis: that universal truths are knowable and in fact already known. However, allegory assumes no such thing. On the contrary, it assumes that divine truth is no longer perceptible to our "fallen" understandings and so investigates the capacity of different interpretative, linguistic systems to reform our apprehension of the world's visibilia and make its divine allegoria comprehensible. The theory of allegory proposed by critics such as Clifford limits its range of concern to the moral, without relating those moral problems to the cognitive dilemmas of which they are symptomatic.

The significance of the Lady Meed episode in Piers Plowman has often been foreshortened in this way. As a personification figure, the external referent or "tenor" to the "vehicle" that is Lady Meed, has been variously described as: "a la fois récompense et corruption" by Jusserand, "reward in general and bribery in particular" by Skeat and Chambers, while Dunning describes her function early in the poem as "gain", later modulating to "cupidity".<sup>10</sup> These somewhat short-sighted interpretations of Meed fail to recognise that her status in the poem

is primarily that of a pun, that she is indicative of the "fallen" state of language. As with many allegoric personification figures, her nature is suggested by her genealogy - or rather, her etymology. Meed is condemned by Lady Holy Church as a bastard: "For Fals was hir fader that has a fikel tonge".<sup>11</sup> The medieval conception of evil is of an absence of the good, of a formlessness or meaninglessness which, in terms of language, acts to displace words from their proper relationships of signification. Under the influence of Fals, Meed is partially removed from her legitimate signifying function. That this is the substance of Holy Church's charge of illegitimacy is made apparent by Theology's contrary claim that she is, in fact, legitimate: "For Mede is muliere, of Amendes engendred". (II,119). So in the "fallen" world of the poem and subject to the influence of evil, Meed functions as a pun: her "transcendental signified" can be either Truth or Fals. Her availability to two mutually exclusive interpretations is enacted through the device of the marriage, particularly the debate over who Meed is to marry: Fals Fikel-tonge or Conscience. It is Conscience alone who recognises Meed's true status, who can see that she names both spiritual treasure and earthly reward, within the more general signification of "treasure". He attempts to define both of these roles, to expose the linguistic confusion that underlies this social vice. But within the society of Passus II, Meed names only those relationships in which reward is disproportionate to desert. It is a society ruled by the "false", who act to disrupt and destroy all coherent verbal, cognitive and moral structures. The problem of meaning posed by Meed reveals the capacity of a "fallen" language to generate not only a corruption of understanding but also a corruption of society.

Langland's allegory demonstrates the interrelationships which exist between language, interpretation and the manner of cognition it reveals, and moral, social action. But the theory of allegory proposed

by such critics as Gay Clifford ignores the linguistic dimension which forms the thematic substance of allegory, and considers it only as a mode of expression, a way of encoding abstractions so that an ethical "lesson" is persuasively revealed. This "allegoric sense" is given material form by the metaphoric or symbolistic aspect of the narrative, which also gives these concepts "vitality".<sup>12</sup> Through the imagery and the dramatic relationships developed in the action, so Clifford's argument goes, patterns of relationships are established between ideas and abstractions, along with a scale of values or "hierarchy" by which to judge the significance of individual incidents and their relevance to the overall meaning. The temporal unfolding of the plot is assumed to be controlled and directed by a didactic authorial objective and the primary necessity that the reader perceive it. Consequently, all aspects of meaning are referred back to this emergent didactic theme. Northrop Frye's comments about allegory have fuelled this theoretical approach; observations such as:

We have actual allegory when a poet explicitly indicates the relationship of his images to examples and precepts. . . . If this seems to be done continuously, we may say, cautiously, that what he is writing "is" an allegory. In The Faerie Queene, for instance, the narrative systematically refers to historical examples and the meaning to moral precepts, besides doing their own work in the poem.<sup>13</sup>

The concept of an image structure that corresponds explicitly and continuously to an external structure of ideas effectively reduces the allegoric narrative: in the manner of an allegorised "sacred" work.

The role of the allegorising critic is assigned to the allegorist, with the difference that he is no longer envisaged as revealing sacred truths but instead expounding moral ones. Associations between allegory and didacticism are largely responsible for this scenario, together with the sustained notion that texts do not mean what they literally say. Allegoresis relies upon the assumption that a radical disjunction exists between the literary sign and its object of reference, a disjunction that must be bridged by a discursive hermeneutic, either within or external to the work. Hence the idea that an allegoric work contains within itself an explicit commentary on its own action and image structure. This is the origin of the concept that allegory is a hierarchical form and of the critical focus upon supposed "levels" of meaning, which in later theorising are incorporated into a substantive concern with hierarchies of value.

Medieval discussions of multiple allegorical meanings use not the term "levels", but significatio or sensus.<sup>14</sup> The metaphor of levels, with its connotations of stratification and hierarchy is a specifically modern usage and one which seems to derive from allegoresis. The allegorising critic, finding the literal "level" of the work unacceptable, turns his attention to its "levels" of reference, which are found to prefigure contemporaneous cultural values. This practice became the methodological basis of the four-fold exegesis of the Bible, wherein four aspects of meaning - the literal, allegorical, tropological and anagogical - correspond to the Christian conception of the structure of the universe. As a practical critical tool, this theoretical scheme is notoriously difficult to apply; as is well known in the case of Dante's The Divine Comedy. However, the concept is still current and seems to have been rationalised into the belief that literary allegories are substantively concerned with the analysis of similarly stratified systems of value. Angus Fletcher's metaphor of "satellites" of meaning,

launched into orbit by the work's littera, is more accurate.<sup>15</sup> It suggests that as the allegory proceeds it uses different narrative modes - different ways of giving meaning to or understanding the narrative - to encourage in the reader a series of different forms of perception. Consequently, the kind of meaning expressed by the work varies with the perspective it provides for the reader. As one set of thematic or imagistic associations, one "satellite", is brought to the fore another recedes to the background.

Both Giles Goat-Boy and the Prologue to Piers Plowman provide examples of this technique. The reader of the Prologue is made to recognise, through a constant variation of interpretative perspectives, that the "satellites" of meaning derived from the work's littera are determined by the structures through which they are perceived. Formal structures such as these - fable, sermon, personification, satire - are supplanted by substantive hermeneutic perspectives in Giles Goat-Boy. The characters encountered by the hero, George, are loaded with historical, psychological, philosophical and sociological significance. George's mentor, Max Spielman, is associated with Chiron and Virgil, Einstein and Oppenheimer, Freud and Jung; in his archetypal aspect he is the eternally wandering and suffering Jew; while in the context of the "story" he is the "humane scientist". To adopt any one of these identities as his only "referent" is to foreground one set of associations as an interpretation of his function and significance, a "satellite" of meaning, which forces all other possible interpretations to recede into the background. Such is the case with most of the characters in this allegory. But the whole process relies absolutely upon the literal surface of the work which contains all aspects of meaning, all possible "satellites". A crucial difference between an allegorised text and an allegoric narrative is that allegoresis effectively consumes this verbal surface as it draws it into an explicit correspondence with some

external system of ideas; the littera ceases to be unique as it becomes an illustration of a system of cultural beliefs. This happens also to an allegory when treated as an expression of moral values; its verbal aspect, if seen as an imagistic code, disappears in the act of decoding. But because of its polysemantic nature an allegoric narrative is never completely exhausted in this way. As Mary Carruthers observes of Piers Plowman, the problem of meaning is as difficult for its characters as it is for its readers. The language of the poem, and the linguistic context in which its characters move, is marked by ambiguity, puns, and half-realised metaphoric implications. It is a radically "fallen" language which the poem seeks to "redeem" by pursuing and analyzing the signs that express truth.<sup>16</sup> Carruthers and Quilligan both have noted the concern with interpretation in allegory, that is a concern with the capacity of language and literary works to express truth. But the allegorist questions the assumption that allegoresis finally affirms: while the allegorist conducts his enquiry in a narrative form, the allegorical critic expresses the "truth" of a text in a discursive commentary.

However, allegory does imitate, among other cognitive forms, this very process of discursive reasoning, of exegesis. If we were to view allegory in Aristotelian terms it would appear to imitate not "nature" but the nature of the mind. So, as Maureen Quilligan puts it, allegory must use

... that system of signs that retrieves for us the process of intellection.<sup>17</sup>

Interpretation is the subject of the narrative action, but that action is performed by language, within the context of language, and in such a manner that the full cognitive capabilities of language are explored. The generic plot structure of allegory begins by establishing the

fallen condition of language and the extent of the disruptive effect this produces in every social, moral and cognitive system of relations. Later it will be argued that these effects are produced through the operation of entropy: the conceptual metaphor which, in Pynchon's work, supplants that of the Fall. Emerging from this context, a question or dilemma is posed: Langland's Will asks "how may I save my soul?"; the Red Cross Knight is set the task of slaying the dragon; Stencil asks "what or who is V.?" and Oedipa questions the existence of the Trystero. The solution to problems such as these involves the whole problem of salvation, of discovering whether or not the invisible - moral and spiritual - concepts signified by language are real, and if words are adequate as the signs of these "truths". Consequently, the hero/ine is unprepared initially to succeed. But the quest he pursues takes the form of a learning process; its temporal development images forth the progressive nature of his pursuit of knowledge, which is the reconstruction of his understanding: his capacity to read correctly. The attempt to "redeem" understanding is intrinsically bound to the "redemption" of language, and can be achieved only through interpretation. Therefore, it is primarily the images in the narrative that express the hero's progress.

As noted in relation to Giles Goat-Boy, when the structure through which the images are presented is changed, a new cognitive perspective is revealed: a different "satellite". Or to put it in Augustine's terms, the altered perception of the sign "causes" an alternative form of understanding. Throughout the narrative, a variation of imagistic devices develops and reveals a consecutively more complete comprehension of the Word, truth, that is the signifier of all language and history and which makes them significant. The progression from initial opacity to increasing transparency of meaning as the images are explicated, as the metaphoric "tenors" are gradually

discovered, is the temporal relation between presentation, explication and revelation that underlies discursive reasoning. Although the images at first appear opaque, clues to their meanings are given and it is in the intricate process of unravelling that follows that allegory imitates the mental processes of interpretation. So in Book I of The Faerie Queene, Una's initially veiled appearance indicates the inadequacy of the Red Cross Knight's comprehension of truth: although he sees truth, he sees it imperfectly with only an intuitive, clouded knowledge of it. Of course the meaning of such an image may seem apparent immediately to the reader; so it should be noted here that a gap often exists between the rhetorical world available to the reader and the allegoric or textual world of the character. So meanings which are apparent to the reader's mind may not be accessible to the hero at a given stage in his development. The tableau scene that opens Piers Plowman is a case in point. The meaning of the scene may be seen simply as an emblematic rendering or encoding of an abstract spiritual structure assumed to exist in the world: the "Tower of Truth" on high, the "Dungeon of Evil" below and the world of commonplace humanity wandering between. It is not until Will repeatedly questions the meaning of the scenes that surround him that their specific significances are seen to be highly questionable indeed; the tower may well be that of "Truth", but what then is "Truth"? So the reader and character reach a point in their respective questionings where this disjunction becomes a conjunction. It is in this way that allegory draws the reader into an interpretative relationship with its unstated meanings, as the hero assumes the status of a "surrogate-reader". The devices of interpretative mimesis involve the two "readers" in the interpretation of a common text.

After the initial question or dilemma is posed, the characteristic allegoric plot proceeds, through a series of interpretative narrative

modes, to develop the "inner word" of the hero. This is prerequisite to a figural perception of the "Word", of the sacred which informs all aspects of the allegoric text, through the pretext. The hero's character is one object of analysis within the narrative; the concepts with which he is confronted and the perceptual forms in which they are presented also participate in whole spiritual structure that is the allegory's context. Personification figures, for instance, are both representative of subjective psychological states and are themselves assumed to exist objectively as abstract entities. It was mentioned earlier that allegory seeks to establish interpretative principles that make possible the comprehension of realities that cannot, in a post-lapsarian world, be apprehended literally. Realities which include ideal essences or Platonic Ideas, divine intelligences, and forces within the human psyche; all of which exist subjectively through perception and objectively as discrete entities. Consequently, the metaphoric figures which are revealed analytically to be representative of these "realities" are of differing ontological status. So the learning process in which they participate teaches the hero not only to distinguish between appearance and reality but also to recognise different signifying forms of Truth and the False; to develop and fulfil his own "inner word", that necessary understanding of both absolutes which is central to the figural conception of language.

But figuralism is essentially an historical mode of interpretation: it reveals signs - words, persons and events - to be aspects of a spiritual pattern that is manifest through time. One event is interpreted through another; the immediate sign or figura embodies and reveals in its meaning the imago foreshadowed in it. So the past prefigures the present; the present reveals and fulfills the past; and both prefigure a future revelation. This future event to which they both point is, in the Christian exegetical tradition, to be the ultimate

fulfilment of the divine semiotic pattern, the Last Judgement and the end of all time. Thus temporal events are incomplete in an historical form, their fulfilment is constantly deferred, but they are eternally fulfilled in God's providential design. From the perspective of eternity they have always existed, though veiled from human perception. Time is the medium of revelation as it links temporal signs within the divine pattern but figural time is the progressive manifestation of this pattern, which is both atemporal and omnitemporal. Like the signs which express it, it exists within all time, but unlike them it is a divine order that ultimately transcends temporal categories. The historical figura itself both gives temporal form to the timeless and is a sign of it; it is as Walter Benjamin argues, both an emblem of "hidden knowledge" and itself an object of knowledge;<sup>18</sup> or in Erich Auerbach's words, it is

... the creative, formative principle,  
change amid the enduring essence, the  
shades of meaning between the copy and  
the archetype.<sup>19</sup>

A figural hermeneutic is required to reveal the continuity of the divine pattern informing human history. That which we perceive as a temporal progression, a series of discontinuous moments, is unified in the spiritual order which exists in "God's eye-view" as history-all-at-once. The accuracy of interpretation is directly dependent upon a correctly oriented will and spiritual understanding: the inner word that recognises signs in their relationship to a divine reality. The visible sign is resignified through interpretation from its literal reference to include a spiritual significance. So figural interpretation demonstrates an inner intelligence of the nature of the revealed Word.

Meaning is not divorced from the "spirit" which informs it: the sign signifies a literal object of reference and metaphorically, a spiritual reality. This interpretative understanding is further revealed in figurally significant narrative action: as remarked earlier, the "inner word" is the agent of moral action.

The figural conception of an order of reality that is comprehensible rather than apprehensible, but which informs the visible, is fundamentally Platonic. The Word corresponds, in Christian terms, to the Platonic idea of a unity, an archetypal One that exists behind the multiplicity of history and language, or the variety of sensory experience. Thus, worldly phenomena - the visibilia of the allegoric world - are assumed to be a function of the unseen Idea or transcendent pattern, the revelation of which is the climax of the generic allegoric plot. The development of this plot is based upon the assumption of a functional analogy between material phenomena and spiritual reality; so the allegoric "world" itself comprises a system of significant correspondences which become progressively more apparent as the hero's capacity to perceive and understand is enlarged. So the style of an allegoric narrative - that is, the nature of its image structure - is in the broadest sense symbolic. A protracted controversy about this symbolistic aspect of allegory still rages, and one consequence of this debate is that the business of defining the genre has been correspondingly limited. All symbolic modes share the assumption that an integral relationship exists between modes of being, and that knowledge of invisible realities is available through the principle of analogy. The Romantic concept of the symbol, however, denies its function as a conventional epistemological sign and constructs of it instead a mystical bridge between the imagination and a transcendent unity. The symboliste conceives of the world as the emanation of a divine One, and the symbol as an avenue for direct, non-discursive knowledge of that divinity. So

the symbol both participates in, and fuses with, the reality of the "Other" in a form of mystical metonymy, a momentary illumination or vision. But this conception overlooks the fact that both the allegoric sign and the symbol are characterised by an inevitable discrepancy between the form of the image and its meaning. Their primary difference is one of degree. The symbolic referent is assumed to be somehow inherent or incarnated in the visible image, whereas the allegoric image operates on the principle of metaphor: its referent is displaced from the metaphoric "vehicle" so that it can be discovered through interpretation, progressively and analytically, in the imitation of discursive reasoning. Allegory assumes that an inherent relationship exists between the world's visibilia and its unseen allegoria, but it is a relationship that can only be revealed through a discursive hermeneutic. This relationship is temporally perceived as one of dependence: the dependence of what is literally seen upon that which is seen through metaphor. These are different modes of being and, as Isabel MacGafferey argues, are not assumed to be identical, as they are by the symbolists. A gap always exists in the analogy, but it is the fact of this analogy that links them into a single providential scheme. Just as the existence of a word suggests that of its referent, so visible phenomena logically imply an abstract cause and the world's visibilia assumes the existence of its allegoria.<sup>20</sup> The allegoric narrative is based upon this sort of logic, and traces its development through until the relationship between the particular and the universal becomes apparent: until the Red Cross Knight perceives the figural pattern of history and and Will understands the central signifying function in language of the Word.

It was noted above that the idea of a spiritual order of reality informing history and language raises a basic epistemological problem: is the perceived order projected by the mind or does it reside in the

nature of reality? Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene assume that it exists objectively in reality but can only be approached through interpretation; that is, through the mind. Consequently, the narrative at first focuses upon the development of the hero's manner of interpreting, his "inner word", which enables him finally to perceive this divine pattern and gain the knowledge necessary to the successful completion of the task, or solution to the problem, with which he set out. The allegoric plot does not however end with this spiritual enlightenment or realisation. All allegoric narratives are characterised by a final return to the contingent: Redcrosse's return to the New Jerusalem is deferred indefinitely, with the implication that other "feends" may yet appear; while the Antichrist dominates the action of the final passus of Piers Plowman and Will, after he is assaulted by "Elde", takes refuge in the church "Unitee" which is under seige by the "false". For if Truth exists objectively in reality, so too then does the False, and although the hero may learn to read the signs which constitute his "world" so that the redeeming pattern of truth is perceived, this does not save the society fallen deep into apostasy. But the predominant effect of this return to the temporal and the "fallen" is to cast doubt upon the existence and efficacy of a redeeming order, and to put the reader in the position where he must choose and either assent to the pattern of redemption outlined by the narrative or reject it. Later allegorists, such as Hawthorne and Melville, Barth and Pynchon, place the reader in a similar position. But rather than begin with the assumption that a divine reality exists objectively, Hawthorne and Melville assume that meaning is projected subjectively, and then enquire into the possibility that it also exists objectively, as a transcendent Idea, separate from the individual consciousness. But although this basic epistemological problem is thus approached from a different direction, the form of these later allegories still corresponds to that of earlier

"traditional" allegoric narratives; it is simply a revisionary re-reading of the formal possibilities of the genre.

A modification of the plot structure accompanies this shift in approach, a modification that affects the status of the pretext in relation to the narrative. As was mentioned above, an allegory is a fictional form of commentary upon an anterior pretext or work that is reputed to articulate the sacred. But the capacity of the narrative to produce a pretextual revelation is determined by the hero's ability to read the temporal signs of a spiritual or invisible reality. Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene attempt to redeem the effects of the Fall by reestablishing the pattern of Christian redemption, by resignifying their metaphoric signs so that they become significant in relation to a perceived divine pattern. However, the dominant metaphor of a modern allegory like Hawthorne's "Rappaccini's Daughter" is revealed to be significant only in terms of a psychological order of reality. This is the case with the personification figures of Book I of The Faerie Queene, but Redcrosse is able to progress beyond the stage of a psychological self-awareness to perceive the signs of a figural order operating within history. Hawthorne's hero, Giovanni, does not reach the stage of self-knowledge. Through the pretextual Eden myth, "Rappaccini's Daughter" re-enacts the Fall; but it is through a contrast with The Divine Comedy that the extent of this "fall" is revealed and the nature of what is fallen from is implied. More so than in earlier allegories "Rappaccini's Daughter" places the onus upon the reader to decide whether or not a spiritual order of reality exists to be perceived. The function of the pretexts is to suggest that it does but the fact that the central revelation takes place within the context of the contingent casts doubt upon it. Like all allegories the meanings contained in "Rappaccini's Daughter" do not exist outside a semiotic or pseudo-linguistic system. However, a central sign or Word which informs

this system is revealed through the pretextual action of both Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene. It is the inability of Hawthorne's narrative to identify such a transcendental "center" within the play of its signs that accounts for the final ambiguity of its spiritual dimension and the foreshortening of its plot. And it is the reader who, in the act of interpreting the narrative, must "center" its metaphoric system.

This is one of the "gaps" which characterise the allegoric narrative and which, as Wolfgang Iser puts it, must be closed through the "free play of meaning-projection".<sup>21</sup> Many theorists have observed the paratactic or episodic character of allegory, and the characteristic absence of causal linkages between episodes. So it is the reader who must uncover the relations which are not expressed by the narrator, by filling in these "gaps" hermeneutically. In this way, the reader is drawn into the processes of interpretation which are the subject of the narrative action; the object of allegory's interpretative mimesis is its reader. As the "tenors" of the metaphoric "vehicles" become increasingly apparent to the hero, as the narrative progresses, so too the reader's interpretation becomes increasingly more complete. The participation, which is thus required of the reader, urges an introspection into the ways in which meaning is produced. The reader is placed in a position akin to that of the hero: both learn the answers to the problems posed by the narrative by learning - in the reader's case re-learning - how to read.

But the interpretation of an allegory does proceed temporally; it is the need to revise constantly the interpretation, in terms of the next episode in the sequence, that creates an exegetical self-awareness and undermines any confidence the reader may have initially in their ability to read correctly. For example, the reader may confidently interpret Lucifera as a type of Pride, so the character and action of that episode of The Faerie Queene is simply translated into an abstract

statement. Yet shortly afterwards Redcrosse encounters Orgoglio, also a type of Pride. This may seem inconsistent or even irrelevant until the differing ontological status of the two is recognised: Lucifera as an incarnation of Pride signifies an aspect of the Knight's psychological state, but Orgoglio is Pride itself objectively conceived and indicative of the evil in which Redcrosse participates. They are among the causes or motives which allegory elucidates; causality is obliquely dramatised by requiring that the reader recognise the specific significance of a particular cause. Thus allegory's episodic form is the result of the attempt to involve the reader in its development. Likewise, the self-reflexive or self-referential quality of the allegoric narrative is designed to distract the reader's attention from the literal storyline and refocus it upon the production of meaning, to discourage a literal reading which overlooks the allegory's cognitive and linguistic concerns.

The narrative is predicated on the idea of a universe characterised by significant correspondences yet it is the reader who must identify an inherent relationship between the elements of the analogy, based upon a single signifying center. The reader is required to complete the correspondence between a temporal, material sign - the text - and its potentially divine dimension: a response to the sacred. This personal response is the final aim of all allegories. The allegoric narrative is characteristically open-ended: it concludes within the context of the contingent rather than the absolute in order to compel such a choice and such a response. The "metaphysical orientation" of allegory is this. Like comedy and tragedy, the temporal structure of individual plots may alter, but the metaphysical orientation of the genre does not change. Just as comedy is designed to reveal a purposeful design operating within the universe and tragedy to demonstrate the withdrawal of religious certainty, so allegory is designed to reveal a

significant interpretative correspondence between temporal signs and a "sacred" reality. Modern narratives may, through the altered status of the reader, suggest that this analogical relationship exists subjectively and that the perceived spiritual order has only a potential objective existence, but the response that is compelled in the reader is the same as that required by Piers Plowman or The Faerie Queene.

The plots of these "traditional" allegories begin by establishing the effects of the Fall in every set of temporal relationships. A central question emerges from this context and in the attempt to solve the dilemma the narrative explores a variety of interpretations or interpretative modes which also nurture and develop the Augustinian "inner word" of the hero. In later allegories the hero is unable to overcome his cognitive weaknesses but the reader instead is obliged to develop, through interpretation, the understanding and capacity to read correctly. It is this ability which ideally leads the traditional hero, and the reader, to a species of epiphany, a realisation of the invisible order that informs a temporal semiotic system. The hero's "illumination" is, however, only momentary and the narrative quickly returns him to the context of the contingent. The reader of a modern allegory is compelled to respond to a transcendent reality within the context of the contingent; the plot structure is in this way fore-shortened, as the result of a changed attitude towards the ontological status of the perceived spiritual order. This modification is analogous to the shortening of the tragic plot by the modern drama of the absurd. The response elicited from the reader though, and the metaphysical orientation of the genre it reveals, remain in both cases unchanged. In effect the literary plot is, as Jonathon Culler observes, "the temporal projection of thematic structures".<sup>22</sup> And although the substantive dimensions of individual texts may change through time, with a corresponding alteration in plot, these "thematic structures" which

characterise the genre encompass historical transformations.

The historical modification of allegory - the context for Pynchon's work - is due largely to a change in attitude towards the pretext. The objective status of the revealed spiritual or figural pattern is validated, in conventional allegoric narratives, by the authority held by the sacred pretext. As a pretextual commentary, the narrative shares the authority of the anterior work. But as the validity of this prior authority increasingly comes into question, the onus is placed upon the reader to confer a private authority upon both the pretext and its narrative commentary. Consequently, in modernist and postmodernist allegoric forms the pretext shares the self-consciously fictive nature of the whole construct: text and narrative commentary. But, as in the allegories of Hawthorne and Melville, there must always exist the possibility that a signified "sacred" order may reside in reality and that a "transcendental signifier" may yet be revealed amid the free play of the allegoric signs.

John Barth's Giles Goat-Boy and Vladimir Nabokov's Pale Fire represent two significant though antithetical responses to this historical devaluation of pretextual authority - a problem to which all modern allegories must address themselves. Giles Goat-Boy, by incorporating a considerable number of pretexts into its system of signification calls into question, but finally affirms, both the relevance and validity of the pretextual relationship. The archetypal or "sacred" dimension of the hero's quest encapsulates the mythic lives of Christ, Buddha, Aeneas and Dante, amongst others. But on the other hand, a work such as Pale Fire effectively demonstrates the incapacity of an ironic or parodic relationship between the pretext and its narrative commentary to produce allegory.<sup>23</sup> As was mentioned previously, the primary function of the pretext is to establish a suprarealist system of signs which is amenable to a figural hermeneutic and is consequently capable

of naming real and active universals and of making comprehensible the sacred power that informs phenomenal events and language. It is this function, represented by the pretext as a fait accompli, that validates any similar accomplishment by the allegoric narrative. At the same time the narrative, as a pretextual commentary, is designed to create in the reader an awareness of the values represented by the pretext and of its status as an authoritative interpretation of the world. The characteristic allegoric relationship between the narrative and pretext is, therefore, symbiotic.

Pale Fire, however, substitutes for this scheme a parasitic relationship between text and commentary; it focuses squarely upon the problem of allegorical interpretation - allegoresis - by including the prior, privileged text in the form of a document. This explicit presentation of the pretext works counter to its conventional allegoric function, violating as it does the distance which is traditionally preserved between the allegoric text and its pretext. Allegory establishes the pretextual relationship in an oblique manner: primarily through typology, significantly named characters or figurally significant actions. The texts exist in parallel, a hermeneutic distance separating them. In this way, the allegoric narrative attends to the significance of the pretext rather than its specific meaning. A major point of divergence between allegory and allegoresis has already been located in this distinction between the significance and the meaning of the sacred text. As I have pointed out, while allegory is concerned with the broadly conceived spiritual significance of the pretext, allegoresis attends only to its specific textual meaning. In other words, allegoresis deals with the pretext as a document: a document the meaning of which has become either unacceptable or inaccessible and which must be retrieved through interpretation. The instability of meaning thus assumed by allegoresis is at odds with the allegoric conception of the

pretext. In the form of a document, susceptible to a revisionary thematic interpretation that leaves its form undisturbed, the authority of the pretext is radically undermined: the text becomes a function of its interpretation. As allegoresis incorporates the pretext into itself - literally consuming it - it creates a closed system of meaning that contrasts sharply with the open-ended character of allegoric narratives. Allegory requires of the reader an independent response to that which is revealed through the pretext: the sacred. The closed system established through allegoresis however, precludes such a response. Maureen Quilligan makes a similar point in her brief discussion of Pale Fire, arguing that this text does not constitute an allegory because

What is missing from Pale Fire is, in fact,  
the essential ingredient of the pretext.<sup>24</sup>

In fact, a specifically sacred pretext is what Pale Fire lacks. John Shade's poem functions as the pretext only in the literal sense that it is a prior text: prior to Kinbote's allegorising commentary. Together, the text and commentary form a closed system designed to lead the reader, not to a recognition of the allegoric "other" (allos), but deeper and deeper into a labyrinth of verbal complexity as the pretext disappears, becoming the shadow or "shade" of its interpretation. Where allegory requires that the reader choose among potential "realities" and so respond to the sacred dimension of the pretext, Pale Fire undermines the whole notion of the "real" in favor of the imaginative or fictive. Consequently, Pale Fire cannot be considered an allegoric narrative: the parasitic relationship between pretext and commentary which it anatomises provides the basis for a complex parody of allegoresis, but precludes the possibility of allegory.

It is the closed quality of Pale Fire, antithetical to the whole

enterprise of allegory, that defines it as an example of late modernist rather than postmodernist fiction. Kinbote, in his preference for an orderly cultural and literary tradition and his aristocratic notions of art, reflects several of the values and beliefs of "high" modernism. Repeatedly, Pale Fire asserts that value should be sought in art, in a secular literary tradition, rather than in the world: a characteristically modernist stance. And it is in this manifest preference for a closed or autonomous literary artifact that modernist texts differ most markedly from those postmodernist forms which are amenable to allegory.

In contrast to the hermeticism of such modernist texts as Pale Fire is the postmodernist tendency towards open, "inquisitive" forms or as Julia Kristeva terms it "the attempt to expand the signifiable";<sup>25</sup> alternatively described by Phillippe Sollers as "the experience of limits".<sup>26</sup> As Kristeva argues,

Let us say that postmodernism is that literature which writes itself with the more or less conscious intention of expanding the signifiable and thus human realm.<sup>27</sup>

Important to the development of a postmodernist allegoric form is the shift in attitude towards language that becomes apparent in this "intention". In comparison to modernist hermeticism, Barth's Giles Goat-Boy and the work of Thomas Pynchon represent a return to, or restoration of, the referential dimension of language. These texts make manifest the assumption that language exists partially as an autonomous system, but also as a set of names which derive their reality from outside the system in an extralinguistic reality.<sup>28</sup> So the function of language opens to two distinct interpretations: it can operate as a "prisonhouse" that is isolated - and isolating - from reality, or it

can act as the means by which extralinguistic realities are discovered. The texts themselves use language as a communication system, using it to make demands upon and elicit responses from the reader. As has frequently been noted, postmodernist texts characteristically attempt to engage the reader in the processes of reading and writing rather than the facts of writer and written artifact.<sup>29</sup>

One way in which this engagement is created is through the actions of a hero whose function is foremost as a reader: who becomes a surrogate-reader. In the manner of the traditional allegoric hero he is an interpreter, as he confronts basic epistemological problems that must be approached through interpretation. The development of his understanding, prerequisite to finding a solution, involves an awareness of the moral, ethical and religious ramifications of these linguistic and cognitive problems. Edward Mendelson attempts to define the nature of Pynchon's work in terms of a contrast with the modernist example of Ulysses by arguing that in Pynchon's fiction, and Gravity's Rainbow in particular, linguistic problems are never divorced from their ethical consequences and determinants. Because he defines quite succinctly a major distinction between modernist and postmodernist linguistic assumptions, it is worth quoting a passage from his essay at length.

Language for Pynchon is not a system complete in itself but an ethically and socially performative (his word is "operative") system, one which can be altered by deliberate acts. The model of language in Ulysses, on the other hand, is characteristically self-enclosed. For Joyce, the history of language is, in effect, an embryological history (in the chapter known as "Oxen of the Sun"), a version of an unconscious cycle unaffected by

personal or social choice. Gravity's Rainbow's history of language (in the episode set in the Kirghiz) is instead political, "less aware of itself", determined by conscious decisions. Consistently, Gravity's Rainbow refers outside itself to the cluster of problems raised by political and ethical conditions, and insists that "letting it sit for a while is no compromise".<sup>30</sup>

Such a linguistic assumption is necessary to allegory, to the allegoric investigation into the reality of the moral and spiritual concepts signified by language, the adequacy of words as the temporal signs of these truths and the relation of such universals to the larger problem of salvation. In comparison to modernist hermeticism, the allegoric attempt to represent an ultimate extralinguistic reality - the Word, the ineffable logos - through its linguistic and social manifestations, certainly appears to be an attempt to "expand the signifiable". Although she is writing only in terms of the secular, Julia Kristeva partially describes the allegoric project of Giles Goat-Boy when she writes of postmodernism as an attempt to represent

That which, through language, is part of no particular language ... That which, through meaning, is intolerable, unthinkable ...<sup>31</sup>

The parallel is almost complete when she terms this a "Dantesque project".<sup>32</sup> For The Divine Comedy is among the many pretexts included by Giles Goat-Boy in its system of signification and, like its Dantesque pretext, Giles Goat-Boy attempts to represent the failure of representa-

tion to capture either the moment of revelation or to represent the ineffable. Characteristically, allegory formulates Truth, the transcendent One, as that which ultimately escapes representation in human language and comprehension within the terms of human cognition. Dante's is, in fact, the archetypal experience when, in his final approach to God, all the means of representation fail him:

ma non eran ciò proprie penne:  
 se non che la mia mente fu percossa  
 da un fulgore in che sua voglia venne.  
 A l'alta fantasia qui mancò possa;  
 ma già volgera il mio disio e 'l velle,  
 si come rota ch'igualmente è mossa,  
 l'amor che move il sole e l'altre stelle. 33

The fundamental contradiction within the allegoric project lies in the attempt to articulate the atemporally true through a temporal mode of representation. Inevitably, this ultimate Truth eludes any specificity in formulation or description. As a consequence, allegory is obliged to deal with intermediary realities; such 'invisibles' as divine intelligences, forces within the human psyche, ideal essences or Platonic Ideas, all of which are of the same kind as Truth though existing on more accessible planes. As such, they function as the signs or manifestations of an ultimate reality which is their informing principle, a "transcendental signifier" which is most fully revealed in a true signifying relationship between the word, perceived reality and divinity (the Word); such a relationship as that outlined in Augustinian terms early in the chapter. It is here that the importance of the pretext to allegory emerges: because it is assumed to articulate the sacred through its language, and to reveal just such a figural pattern in reality, the

pretext validates any similar synthesis achieved by the allegoric narrative through the discovery of a single, transcendent, signifying center in language and the events of history. Because it establishes the culturally accepted "visualisation" of the sacred, within the narrative, the pretext gains the reader's assent to the accuracy of the narrative's approach to Truth. In Piers Plowman, Will is granted a vision of Christ, the divine intermediary between God and man; in Book I of The Faerie Queene, the Red Cross Knight views the New Jerusalem, but is permitted only to gaze upon the blessed souls: he is able neither to enter the city nor to look directly upon the godhead. It is only through intermediaries that they know Truth: Will through a divinely unified linguistic system, Redcrosse through the figural pattern of history. It is the sacred pretext which, in both cases, intimates to the reader the nature of the divine force which is thus partially revealed. So the primary function of the pretext is to act as an interface between the events of the narrative and a sacred reality which exists outside of the representational capacity of the narrative.

However, the characteristic pretext employed by allegory - whilst it is the Bible - specifically is Revelation or the Apocalypse. This should not be surprising: allegory concerns itself with the definition of salvation; the social, cognitive and linguistic problems that adhere to this; and seeks to impress upon its reader the urgency of a choice. But allegory manifests two contrasting responses to this concept of Apocalypse. Giles Goat-Boy, like earlier allegories - The Faerie Queene is an example - deals with the initial stages of the Apocalypse: the advent of the Antichrist, the period of the Great Tribulation, later accompanied by the second coming of Christ, or the emergence of a symbolic Christ-figure. The consequent conflict heralds the millenium, the era of the Messianic Kingdom on earth. But the open-ended character of the narratives always implies that the opposition of such fundamental

forces has not ceased permanently, that Satan may be loosed again, and that the Apocalypse may well be nigh.<sup>34</sup> Piers Plowman, however, is less optimistic about the spiritual fate of humanity: in its conclusion Satan is once again set loose but this takes place in the narrative present rather than at some implied future moment. Modern allegory, which displays a qualified confidence in the mediating power of the pretext, shares the pessimism of Piers Plowman. The concept of humanity succumbed to satanic rule is realised in Pynchon's postmodernist allegories which shift the apocalyptic focus of the plot from the signs of Truth to those of Evil. And it is from this displacement of focus that the primary modifications made to the generic structure of allegory proceed.

The nature of the conflicting forces still is made apparent through the work's pretextual antecedents. But postmodernist allegory must come to terms with the process of historical devaluation which has undermined the authority of the anterior, pretextual narrative. Giles Goat-Boy accommodates itself to this situation by including many pretexts and, by a careful modulation of parodic, comic and serious elements, adapts them to their conventional allegoric function. Pynchon's narratives are more sceptical of the possibility of such accommodation. Their hero/ines are confronted with mysterious signs, historical figurae, the meaning, the epistemological and ontological status of which are all uncertain. Consequently, they are compelled to search for an authoritative "text", a valid interpretation of reality which will establish a coherent system of signification. So whilst a series of localised meanings emerge, giving the figura - be it V., the Tristero or the Rocket - a vague generalised significance, its status within an eternal figural design cannot be ascertained, absolutely. Ronald Sukenick elaborates upon the implications of such a situation, claiming that in a world from which God, as author, has withdrawn, the plot of

history is unknown and finally unknowable; without the sanction of the author, the authenticity of any received version of reality cannot be verified; time ceases to be purposive and destiny gives way to chance.<sup>35</sup> This argument may well be based upon an intentional fallacy but such are the general conditions of Pynchon's "world". Yet the single pretext shared by all allegoric narratives - Revelation - is employed here also. And implicit in the very condition of this "fallen" world is the suggestion that God has not, in fact, withdrawn, but rather that the pervasive, corrupting influence of the Antichrist - which attacks all coherent systems of signification, of cognition, of interpretation - has simply yet perhaps irredeemably obscured all temporal traces of Truth. Within this apocalyptic context, the function of the allegoric narrative is to attempt to retrieve and to reconstitute these figural traces, to vivify the narrative's verbal signs.

But the displacement of narrative focus from the forces of Truth to those of Evil, which is manifest in modern apocalyptic forms, requires that a corresponding modification be made to the figural base of allegory. This is, in fact, the major modification made to the generic structure of allegory and one which has far-reaching structural consequences. But it should not be thought that this shift in focus denies the allegoric nature of the narratives. Truth and Evil are of the same kind, though quite different in their temporal manifestations. And this is the crux of the problem which such a development poses to allegoric figuralism.

As I have pointed out, conventional figuralism seeks some coherent signifying relationship between realms of being within a providential scheme, a common source of all temporal signs in the Word. As a consequence of the historical devaluation of pretextual authority, the hermeneutic distance which separates Pynchon's narratives from their pretextual antecedent - Revelation - is expanded. Although the two

kinds of text exist in parallel, it is only an oblique relationship that is established between them. The onus is placed entirely with the reader to make the interpretative "leap" which will make a coherent signifying relationship explicit. But the necessity that the reader make a significant response - that a private authority be conferred upon the pretext and the free play of narrative signs be "centered" in a correspondence between the textual sign and some invisible, spiritual reality - has become more urgent. The context within which this demand is made has changed character: it is no longer merely the contingent, it is the Apocalypse. And the difficulty of making such a response increases in proportion to its urgency.

The primary effect of this apocalyptic context is to undermine the very basic assumptions of figural interpretation. Figuralism assumes that temporal signs exist as aspects of a spiritual pattern that is revealed through time. So time functions as both the progressive manifestation of this atemporal and omnitemporal pattern, and as the medium of revelation. But it is the historical figurae, which give temporal form to the timeless and act as the signs of it - as objects of knowledge in their own right - that are the immediate objects of figural interpretation. For if interpreted correctly, these signs are assumed to yield true, though necessarily partial, knowledge of the divine semiotic pattern. A figural hermeneutic draws these signs into a signifying relationship with the transcendent pattern - the "transcendental signifier" - by resignifying them, drawing out a latent metaphoric reference so that they encompass a literal and spiritual significance. In this way, the nature of the spirit which informs verbal meaning - logos, the Word - is revealed; just as it is revealed in figurally significant historical events. But it is the development of an "inner word", or the Platonic "writing on the soul", that presents such a mode of perception to the allegoric hero. He must possess the necessary

understanding and desire in order to perceive temporal signs as the figurae of external spiritual realities and interior spiritual states, and to perceive his own self in relation to a providential system. As we shall discover, many of Pynchon's hero/ines never progress beyond the stage of developing this self-knowledge. Either as the result of a wilful refusal to accept that which they finally perceive - as Herbert Stencil does - or because they can never finally be sure that the perceived pattern exists objectively in reality rather than as a subjective projection of the mind, a paranoia - as is Oedipa's dilemma - these characters do not achieve a figural revelation: that burden is the reader's alone.

However, the difficulty of such an undertaking arises from the very nature of the spiritual forces they confront. The archetypal figural sign is Christ - the Word made flesh - whose figure reveals the beginning and end of Christian time, from the Fall to the New Jerusalem; whose career figures forth the significance of history and the ultimate destiny of the soul, pointing the way to salvation. Piers Plowman and The Faerie Queene represent Christ as such, as the transcendental signifier of history and language. But the figural experiences of Langland's Will and Spenser's Red Cross Knight are not repeated in the various quests of Stencil or Oedipa, Enzian, Tchitcherine or Slothrop. For the history in which they participate and the words which they speak are informed, or rather misinformed, by the corrupting influence of the Antichrist. Theirs is not simply a fallen, apostatical society, it is the society ruled by the false Christ; they are citizens of the Great Tribulation. The figurae that they perceive both give temporal form to atemporal Evil, and act as the violent, decadent signs of it. So no coherent figural system can be articulated, this being the very kind of organisation that is susceptible to satanic dissolution. Evil is manifest in the temporal world primarily through the disruption of

coherent systems: social, moral and linguistic. In linguistic systems, it acts to disrupt the process of signification by diverting words from their proper relationships of signification and, by extension, away from the divine signifier: the Word. From the resulting ambiguity, in which concepts like Truth and Evil lose their precise definition, a series of moral and social consequences follows. Society becomes decadent, falls into apostasy, as ethical and moral concepts become indistinct and hazy; in figural terms, the "writing on the soul" is now illegible: where once an "inner word" would be inscribed, corruption now takes root. For the Antichrist is just that, contradicting every representation made by Christ. Rather than represent the unity of time - as a revelation of the sacred - Satan manifests history as the record of violent moments and the history of civilisation as the accumulation of detritus: "a latrine filling under the effects of gravity", as one of Pynchon's commentators has put it.<sup>36</sup> Instead of revealing the significance of human life and the soul's destiny, the Antichrist reveals a void, a meaninglessness, at the center of the "shithole of history".<sup>37</sup> Satanic influences are designed not to redeem the effects of the Fall, as are the forces of Truth, but to exaggerate and accelerate them; Satan brings not the promise of eternal life but the knowledge of certain death. Under his rule then, society is not simply "fallen", rather it is deteriorating rapidly in a decline that will end in Armageddon.

Given this conception of a world in accelerated decay, Pynchon's use of the metaphor of entropy, to supplant that of the Fall in earlier allegories, is apposite. For the effects wreaked by the loosening of Satan correspond to those produced in a world in entropic decline. The analogy between the Laws of Thermodynamics and the realm of religious experience is made quite explicit in Pynchon's short story, "Entropy":

... as every good Romantic knows, the soul  
 (spiritus, ruach, pneuma) is nothing,  
 substantially, but air; it is only natural  
 that warpings in the atmosphere should be  
 recapitulated in those who breathe it.<sup>38</sup>

The correspondence is made by the omniscient narrator as he defines the decadents, akin to the Whole Sick Crew of V, who wander in and out of Meatball Mulligan's lease-breaking party. Like atoms in the closed system of his apartment, their movements become increasingly random, violent and formless through time as the energy they possess is expended in meaningless activity. It is Callisto, however, who has consciously transformed the apartment above into "a tiny enclave of regularity in the city's chaos, alien to the vagaries of weather, of national politics, of any civil disorder"(p.279), who extends the analogy into a rationale for his bizarre form of existence.

The cosmologists had predicted an eventual  
 heat-death for the universe (something like  
 Limbo: form and motion abolished, heat-energy  
 identical at every point in it) ... (p.280).

What Callisto, in his hermetically sealed apartment, does not appear to realise is that some forms of order - whilst perhaps intended to counter the entropic trend - may in fact accelerate it. For although the immediate effect of entropy is to produce chaos, this disorder leads finally to stasis: a stagnant order which is total homogeneity. In this inert state of equilibrium, even mindless, repetitive motion is impossible. All available energy is not simply used up - the First Law of Thermodynamics states that while forms of energy are qualitatively transform-

able, they are quantitatively indestructable - but the potential difference between points in the system is now zero: energy is inconvertible into work. Callisto can envision a similar fate for his culture, in which ideas can no longer be transferred and intellectual motion will cease. Translated into social terms, entropy measures such an incapacity for fresh perception, for ideas to be translated into a new idiom. Within the narrative, this is the style of Meatball's pseudo-intellectual guests, who adopt one cultural mode after another - its customs, cuisine, language - but never invent anything new or unique; whereas Callisto simply repeats the same events of the day, every day. Such "orderliness" as his is conducive to entropic decay, which tends to develop from a situation of the least probable to that of the most probable; forms and distinctions dissolve into a chaos which emerges finally as a lethargic sameness.

The entropic dissolution of distinctions poses obvious problems to interpretation and the efficacy of language: the one based upon a set of assumed relationships between the sign, its signifier and its object of reference; the other based upon a system of difference. Consequently, Pynchon draws upon the significance of the concept of entropy as it figures in information theory. Informational entropy measures the disorder, or probability, within a message. Improbability ensures that a maximum amount of information is communicated, so entropy increases with probability. Therefore, as thermodynamic entropy increases the homogeneity of a system, the amount of significant information available about it is diminished. So, as Mulligan's party progresses, the volume of "noise", or informational disorder, that it produces reaches a "sustained, ungodly crescendo"(p.281). The concept of "noise" is introduced to the narrative by Saul, who responds to Meatball's suggestion that misinterpretation is often the result of a "language barrier" thus:

No, ace, it is not a barrier. If it is anything it's a kind of leakage. Tell a girl: "I love you". No trouble with two-thirds of that, it's a closed circuit. Just you and she. But that nasty four-letter word in the middle, that's the one you have to look out for. Ambiguity. Redundance. Irrelevance, even. Leakage. All this is noise. Noise screws up your signal, makes for disorganization in the circuit (p.285).

The Duke di Angelis quartet attempts to overcome the threat of leakage and noise by performing without instruments, forming a closed, psychic circuit. Of course, nothing is transmitted. This is an informational analogue to Callisto's response to thermodynamic entropy: in both cases an extreme response has the same ultimate effect as submitting to the threatening forces. Callisto's mistress, Aubade, perceives the world entirely in aural terms, her life a constant battle with "noise" as she tries to sustain an equilibrium between order and disorder, a constant "signal-to-noise ratio". Aubade functions as a kind of "Maxwell's Demon" sorting elements into an order which maintains a potential difference between them, the differentiation which resists the entropic pressure towards homogeneity. But the flaw in Maxwell's theory, the fact that such sorting constitutes work and so expends energy, finally defeats Aubade also, through physical and intellectual exhaustion. The death of a small bird in the hot-house apartment and Callisto's failure to communicate any warmth to it, coupled with the constancy of the temperature, reveals the futility of their isolation as protection from the encroaching influence of entropy. Callisto is paralysed by what he perceives to be "omens of apocalypse"(p.280), but Aubade, "as if seeing the single and unavoidable conclusion of all this"(p.292), breaks a

window, shattering the hermetic seal of the apartment

... and turned to face the man on the bed and wait with him until the moment of equilibrium was reached, when 37 degrees Fahrenheit should prevail both outside and inside, and forever, and the hovering, curious dominant of their separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion (p.292).

Meatball Mulligan too is obliged to make a choice in response to the increasing influence of entropy. As the party degenerates into a motiveless brawl, Meatball realises that he can either lock himself away until everyone leaves, or attempt to quieten each individual. Like Aubade, he chooses confrontation and involvement rather than isolation. She brings Callisto's "hothouse of the past" into relation with present reality and, like Meatball, recognises thus flexibility and openness as valid anti-entropic gestures. For in an open system, there remains the possibility that entropy will not increase and may in fact spontaneously decrease, in an "enclave of life"; but this possibility remains only as long as the system resists the pressure towards closure and equilibrium. In a closed system, the only counter to a steady entropic decline is the injection of new energy from an external source. In cultural, religious, terms this would amount to a miracle - perhaps the advent of a Christ-figure - for if the universe actually is a closed system, the only realm from which such energy could originate is the realm of super-nature, of the spirit. But the influence of Satan, in this context, works from within the closed system, accelerating its entropic decline and exaggerating its intermediate effects.

Pynchon's synthesis of thermodynamic and religious concepts is certainly not unique: from the mid-nineteenth century the religious implications of the Laws of Thermodynamics have been debated.<sup>39</sup> The First Law, the law of the conservation of energy, gave grounds to many scholars for the argument that God is manifest in the world through modes of energy or force; that the economy with which nature has been created - so that although forms of energy may be transformed, energy itself cannot be destroyed - is evidence of an omnipresent and omnipotent Deity. To take an example: Herbert Spencer formulated a whole mystical philosophy on the basis of the First Law of Thermodynamics, expressed in his First Principles of a New System of Philosophy (1862). Spencer argued that science and religion correspond in their assimilation of the forces of matter and spirit, inferring from the data of experience the existence of "Infinite and Eternal Energy, from which all things proceed", sharing the "consciousness of an Incomprehensible Omnipotent Power" - an "Absolute Being".<sup>40</sup> Spencer further argued that the power manifest by the universe, the cause of phenomenal existence, is inscrutable and finally unknowable; only the laws of its manifestation can be inferred experientially. Of course Spencer, and many of his fellow scholars, assumed that this ineffable power was a supreme Good; an assumption apparently contradicted by the Second Law: the law of entropy. The concept of an irreversible process in history, of decay and dissolution as a function of time, contradicted any meaningful philosophy of the relation between nature and man, man and God. Yet the prediction of a heat-death for the universe was translated into the Christian concept of perdition, within the context of the Bible's promise of eternal life rather than infinite temporal progress. So the Second Law of Thermodynamics was seen as posing a basic choice to man: Christian redemption or annihilation.

For if the First Law posited the existence of absolute Good, or

Truth, so its contradictory partner implied the existence of Evil, an absolute force operating in time and leading history ever closer to perdition. Henry Adams, in his Education ( a text often referred to by Pynchon's narratives), assumes such a temporal progression.

Satisfied that the sequence of men led to nothing and that the sequence of their society could lead no further, while the sequence of time was artificial, and the sequence of thought was chaos, he turned at last to the sequence of force; and thus it happened that, after ten years pursuit, he found himself lying in the Gallery of Machines at the Great Exposition of 1900, his historical neck broken by the sudden irruption of forces totally new. ... (They) were occult, supersensual, irrational; they were a revelation of mysterious energy like that of the Cross; they were what, in terms of mediaeval science, were called immediate modes of divine substance.<sup>41</sup>

The goddess, the Virgin, and the dynamo share one single characteristic - force. But whereas the Virgin possessed a great creative force, as evinced by the cathedrals of Chartres and Lourdes, the power possessed by the "animated dynamo" is quite other. And Pynchon combines Adams' "dynamo-Virgin" with the force of entropic Evil to produce the Lady V.

CHAPTER TWOVACILLATING IN THE VOID? VERBAL VIVIFICATION IN V.

The very title of V evokes the question: what or who is V.? Although it is not explicitly formulated until much later, this problem forms the exegetical context for the entire narrative. It "frames" the opening scene, set in Virginia, in the vicinity of the "Sailor's Grave" where

... overhead, turning everybody's face green  
and ugly, shone mercury-vapor lights, receding  
in an asymmetric V to the east where it's dark  
and there are no more bars.<sup>1</sup>

It is through such a street, illuminated by V. - the "street of the 20th Century"(p.323) - that the quest for "her" significance leads. V exists as a narrative; as an historical figure, the Lady V.; and as a proliferating number of V.-structures or V.-signs which are perceptible in the narrative world, such as these V-lights. And the three elements share a common base in the quest for V., for the genesis or etiology of the twentieth century - for its presiding genius. The narrative and the quest are virtually identical, united in the attempt to discover the meaning and history of V. through the temporal manifestations of the Lady V. and of seemingly incidental V-signs. But the relationship between the narrative and its quest-structure is one of only virtual identification. A rhetorical gap is sustained between the two "texts" so that whilst a character like Hugh Godolphin or Raphael Mantissa may conceive of V. - as Vneissu or Venus - as a type of void, a "gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation"(p.210), the ongoing development of the narrative plot is directed towards the construction of a figural system

in which V. is the primary figura and object of interpretation. That is, whilst many of its characters are left vacillating in an existential void, the narrative itself attempts to vivify its verbal signs, to discover amid the various significations of V. a signifying center which would be the "spirit" informing modern history, giving it pattern, significance and direction.

Like the "Street", V.'s status is that of a metaphor. However, the "tenors" to the "vehicle" that is V. are so various, their ontological and epistemological status so ambiguous, as to pose the classic allegoric question concerning the capacity of language to signify extraliteral or metaphoric truths and to question the existence of an interpretative structure which would make such truths apparent. The source of this uncertainty is located primarily in the nature and function of V. As an historical entity, she is frequently associated with misinterpretation, misunderstanding, misrepresentation, and politically with cross-purposes, mistranslation and falsification. This is particularly the case in chapter seven, "She Hangs on the Western Wall". The ambivalence surrounding the identity of this "she" is reflected in the narrative, in the confusion between Mantissa's plan to steal Botticelli's Birth of Venus, the activities of his fellow-conspirator the Gaucho, a Venezuelan anarchist, the misinterpretation of Godolphin's Vheissu as the code-name for Venezuela or even Vesuvius, and the uncertain involvement of the spy Vogt. Cognitive confusion such as this in the realm of politics and international espionage, translated into social action, results in riot, violence and death; a "fair of violent death"(p.209), which is contemplated by an "enchanted" Victoria Wren. The uncertain status of V. is also a result of "her" function, which is curiously akin to that of a personification figure. For in V. the signifier and the signified - name and res or referential object - are so closely identified as to become one, so that "she" becomes almost purely a sig-

nifier, and throughout the narrative the range of signification of this single initial or sign is explored in a number of contexts and through different interpretative structures. Many personalities, concepts, things, comprise her system of signification - Victoria Wren, Veronica Manganese, Vera Meroving, Veronica the rat, Venus, violence, ventry, the list could go on - each is defined by V., but does not define V. These signs or avatars of V. are each a partial "truth" which, taken together in a conventional figural structure, would permit valid, if partial, knowledge of the "invisible" or spiritual reality which V. makes manifest. Each sign, interpreted in terms of an immanent semiotic pattern and resignified so as to disclose a latent metaphoric significance, in addition to its literal meaning, would then reveal the nature of the spirit which informs verbal meaning, and the events of history: the "transcendental signifier".

However, such a figural design is not consummated in V: it exists in the structure of the narrative but, in terms of the development of the plot, is foreshortened - as is "Rappaccini's Daughter". And like Hawthorne's narrative, V compels the reader to complete the figural pattern in ways I shall discuss in the final chapter. A possible reason for this incompleteness has been offered by Thomas Schaub, although he does not use the terminology of allegory in his discussion of Pynchon's narratives. Schaub describes the basic opposition in Pynchon's fiction as a conflict between some four-dimensional world of continuous meaning - a space-time continuum - and the temporal, human world of fragmentary experience and necessarily partial perception - a three-dimensional world. The dilemma which confronts the characters who inhabit such a world is that whilst it is experienced in three dimensions it is known in four, and consequently any continuity of meaning is known in abstract terms and experienced only in suspicions. Any integration therefore is expressed in imagistic terms - as abstractions given tem-

poral form - but this very process of temporalizing precludes the possibility of perceiving a timeless unity. As Schaub claims, the quest is problematized by the very attempt to discover the meaning of the world from within the world, or to find within time a true history that exists outside time.<sup>2</sup> He also argues that a sense of unity does exist within this fictional world, but no confirmation of it is given, creating the suspicion that it is withheld because it remains unnamed. However, the attempt to name, amid the complexities of the act of naming, in a postlapsarian, entropic world is the ongoing effort of Pynchon's hero/ines. In William Plater's words, the

... testimony of the word remains the central dilemma of reconciliation with God or, in his absence, perceptible forces of destiny.<sup>3</sup>

V. appears as one such "perceptible force of destiny"; but is also suggestive of a higher, ineffable force, which would be of the same kind as logos, yet is radically "other" in its temporal manifestations and consequences.

The problem of V. is analogous to that presented by Dowel - the central problem of Piers Plowman. And like Dowel, V. cannot be approached or known directly, but instead, through a series of constitutive "sub-categories" or "key words". As we have seen, in the case of Piers Plowman, Will learns the meaning of "kynde" and of "kynde knowynge" as a cognitive mode; the relationship between Jesu, Jesus and Christ; and between Dobet and Dobest, before he knows Dowel as a type or figure of logos, and the function of these key concepts fulfilled as signs or aspects of the Word. There is no single hero of V: Herbert Stencil and Benny Profane are both, in different ways, questers. But it is the narrative itself which explores a number of concepts which

together apparently comprise V. And several of these key concepts are introduced in the first chapters, in the first of a series of episodes concerning Benny Profane (bene profane, thoroughly secular<sup>4</sup>) and his affiliation with a group of New York pseudo-bohemians known as the Whole Sick Crew.

To a considerable extent, the initial sequences of the narrative deal with Profane's reminiscences; a number of vignettes presented in flash-back which are, in effect, variations on the theme of the inanimate dominating or annexing the animate. The whole problem of humanity and how it may be defined, of which this is but one aspect, is addressed explicitly later in the narrative. But initially this increasing ascendancy of a non-human principle is analyzed as a symptom; a symptom of a disease that is progressively diagnosed as, or identified with, V. The sailor, Ploy, is the first character to fall victim to this disease, having his teeth forcibly removed and replaced with a false, U.S.Navy regulation, set. It is amid the comic, almost slapstick, tone of his story that the narratorial observation is made that after his operation Ploy "saw apocalypse"(p.11). This is the first suggestion that the appropriation of the animate by the falsely animate or inanimate may be linked with the imminence of apocalypse. In the "Sailor's Grave", the debased status of the human is represented by the phenomenon known as "Suck Hour" in which sailors are "given suck by a beer tap"(p.13), in the guise of a large foam rubber breast. More significant, however, is the debased condition of language as a referential medium, which appears in the common name shared by all of the barmaids who work there. The over-signification of the name, creating a kind of entropic homogeneity, reduces its referential value to nothing by eliminating the element of difference, the structuring principle which makes any language functionally significant.

"Who did he get," Profane said. "I wasn't looking."

"Beatrice," said Beatrice. Beatrice being another barmaid (p.12).

The influence of the inanimate is, in many instances, a tendency towards this kind of sameness, which causes natural difference to be replaced by manufactured homogeneity.

In characteristically allegoric fashion, such social manifestations of the inanimate principle are causally linked to a linguistic condition; in this case, to the inanimation of language, to the preponderance of nouns over verbs and the corresponding shift in perception that this entails. Profane discovers the existence of such an inanimate vocabulary as an element of the phenomenon of human love for an object. Although this realization is made primarily in terms of his encounter with Rachel Owlglass and her MG, it is corroborated by the relationship between Pig Bodine and his motorcycle, and Da Conho's attachment to his machine gun. All are instances of the mechanical supplanting the human as the "other" in emotional and, particularly in Rachel's case, sexual relationships. But further, Rachel is significantly defined in MG-terms; Profane's communication with her occurs within a context limited, both physically and cognitively, by an object-centered discourse.

They talked in the car always, he trying to find the key to her own ignition behind the hooded eyes, she sitting back of the right-hand steering wheel and talking, talking, nothing but MG-words, inanimate-words he couldn't really talk back at. ... He never got beyond or behind the chatter about her world - one of objects coveted or valued, an atmosphere Profane couldn't breathe (p.27).

But this is the atmosphere in which the Whole Sick Crew exist, their "natural" habitat, and the quality that defines Rachel as a member, albeit peripheral.

R.W.B.Lewis locates a possible source for this label in the phrase "the whole sinful crew", coined by Michael Wigglesworth to describe an apostatical humanity.<sup>5</sup> If this is so, the transformation from "sinful" to "sick" clearly identifies this "crew" as a group which has succumbed to the V.-disease. Certainly, the symptoms are apparent. Even their party is characterized in mechanical terms; it does not develop or progress, but

... as if it were inanimate after all, unwound like a clock's mainspring ..., seeking some easing of its own tension, some equilibrium (p.52).

Fergus Mixolydian, doyen of the Crew, is a living extension of his TV set; the motor function of his nervous system is linked to, and so communicates with, the TV by means of a "sleep switch", surgically implanted in his arm, so that the set turns on and off according to his levels of awareness. But conscious awareness, in terms of the Crew, is scarcely distinguishable from unconsciousness. They share a lethargy, a kind of fin de siècle Romantic "decadence", which is another of V.'s key words.

The pattern would have been familiar - bohemian, creative, arty - except that it was even further removed from reality, Romanticism in its furthest decadence; being only an exhausted impersonation of poverty, rebellion and artistic "soul". For it was the unhappy fact that most of them worked for

a living and obtained the substance of their conversation from the pages of Time magazine and like publications (pp.56-57).

The abuse of language that underlies this decadence is perhaps best illustrated by Slab, the "Catatonic Expressionist" painter, whose work represents "the ultimate in non-communication" (p.56). The Crew share also a predilection for nouns which they simply shift into different combinations to constitute a conversation. Yet a distinction between kinds of nouns is provided by Paola Majistral, the girl who deals only with proper nouns: "Persons, places. No things. Had anyone told her about things?" (p.51). It is an important distinction; Rachel, the Crew member with whom we have, thus far, the greatest familiarity, realizes that she deals with nothing but things. The Crew, in toto, treat people and places as if they were, in fact, objects and, for Rachel, the most recent dilemma posed by an object is Esther's nose.

Surgical prosthesis, as in the case of Fergus' "sleep switch" and Esther's nose, establishes a further and explicit development in the tendency towards the inanimate. This bodily incorporation of inorganic matter is to become one of V.'s most obvious signs. Rachel's confrontation with the plastic surgeon Schoenmaker recalls Ploy's comic encounter with "apocalypse", but now the process is rationalized and argued in terms of an historical principle. Schoenmaker's justification of his profession is based upon the assumption that surgical prosthesis is a matter of purely physical transformation - that the physical and psychological or spiritual are discrete realms, with no interaction between them. So the "grand unbroken chain" (p.48) of inherited characteristics remains unbroken despite individual incursions made by such as he. Rachel objects to this argument by suggesting that a psychological chain of inherited attitudes exists which are vulnerable to change

according to physical transformation. Such a notion of interdependence between "inside" and "outside" is rejected by Schoenmaker, a character who is clearly aligned with the V.-attitude or even V.-metaphysic. This attitude is based upon an obvious preference for external appearance over internal "reality", for manufactured, conventional beauty of the kind constructed by the image-making industries of television and film, advertising and magazines, over natural imperfection. This preference for "skin" rather than "soul", as it is later expressed, is more fully explored in terms of the "tourist" phenomenon. Like tourists, "the lovers of skins"(p.184), the imperfect gathered in Schoenmaker's waiting-room constitute one of the few forms of "communion" to be found in this V.-dominated world. In fact, "communion", with its variety of definitions, is another of V's important key words. Rachel perceives in this group of the physically imperfect and even grotesque "what she feared was a sort of drawing-together or communion"(p.49). It is a communion based upon a common faith in, and preference for, the cosmetic and the exterior. That such an unbalanced attitude is linked, in some way, to the erosion of whatever exists internally, the psychological and spiritual, is obvious in Esther's case. She has no personal integrity, no force of will; her life is a series of dependences upon others who will direct her life for her. She is a passive victim, like Profane aimlessly wandering, or rather "yoyoing", up and down the "street of the 20th century", subject only to the influence of "Fortune".

Stencil characterizes the whole "Sick Crew" in these terms, so that Esther's (non)experience becomes symptomatic of a much farther reaching condition.

Perhaps the only reason they survived, Stencil reasoned, was that they were not alone. God knew how many more there were with a hothouse

sense of time, no knowledge of life, and at  
the mercy of Fortune (p.57).

The "many more" who share this "hothouse sense of time" we will encounter in the historically reconstructed sections of V. For this "hothouse" together with the "Street" comprise the two V.-timescales explored in the narrative, and so are two key concepts in the attempt to define V. One is founded upon a nostalgic conception of time, of history as a cyclical repetition of the past: the "hothouse" is the assumption that time is static, without progress or change, and that the past exists only to be relived in the hermetic medium of memory. The "Street", however, as a psychological attitude, is predicated on the idea that time is linear, that the present exists as a function of the future and consequently that time must be devoted to the realization of dreams of the future. The "Street" is therefore a place of political revolution, of violent opposition to the present order and of death. Both time-schemes, which are later said to be reconciled in V., thus constitute a rejection of the present, of the lived moment or "real time" in favor of illusions, memories and dreams. So the inhabitants of the "hothouse" and of the "Street", the physically imperfect or unacceptable and the tourist share a common opposition to what is, conceptualized in terms of a soulless communion that is in some way related to V. Rachel toys with the idea of such a V.-like time structure whilst contemplating the elaborate clock that ornaments Schoenmaker's office. She watches its dancing imps or demons reflected in a mirror to one side of her, and dancing in "reality" on the other, and wonders

Were there many such reference points, scattered  
through the world, perhaps only at nodes like  
this room which housed a transient population of

the imperfect, the dissatisfied; did real time plus virtual or mirror-time equal zero and thus serve some half-understood moral purpose? Or was it only the mirror world that counted; only a promise of a kind that the inward bow of a nose-bridge or a promontory of extra cartilage at the chin meant a reversal of ill fortune such that the world of the altered would thenceforth run on mirror-time; work and love by mirror-light and be only ... an imp's dance under the century's own chandeliers (p.46).

Stencil's quest is, in a sense, the attempt to articulate such a "mirror world" of "mirror-time" from the vantage of present or "real time"; to hold the two in such a balance that would be the historical equivalent of Sidney Stencil's political "real present"(p.468), a kind of "Golden Mean", and which would reveal the relationship between the two time zones. In fact, the "mirror" image of time is picked up and juxtaposed with Herbert Stencil's "declaration" of his quest.

That Stencil was born at the turn of the century, "in time to be the century's child"(p.52), and raised motherless, suggests that he is in search of a mother figure, and that he interprets accordingly Sidney's crucial journal entry:

There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who but what: what is she. God grant that I may never be called upon to write the answer, either here or in any official report (p.53).

Whilst Stencil rejects the notion that he is pursuing his own mother, in the sense that he seeks the etiology of the century, he is also in search of the impersonal origin of "the century's child". His first forty-four years apparently were spent in a condition of slothful lethargy similar to that which afflicts the Crew. But his inertness and aimless movement on the "Street", are replaced by the single desire to discover V. Paradoxically, the attempt to define V. - which in one aspect is the principle of the Inanimate - results in the animating of Stencil. For if V. is, as I argue, the force which opposes and undermines the concept of system and the coherent principles upon which definition is based, then the very attempt to define her is an act of opposition and one which is expressed in personal qualities that are radically opposed to "her" characteristics. We have already seen such a situation, in Piers Plowman, in Conscience's attempt to deconstruct Lady Meed through definition. And just as peaceful, unwitting coexistence with Meed entails a surrender to the corrupting influence of the pun she reifies, so to live unaware in a world dominated by V. is to become "her" unknowing secular agent, and to become personally dominated by V. - as the members of the Whole Sick Crew would seem to be. So even in the initial stages of his quest Stencil has "this acquired sense of animateness"(p.55), an animateness so valued that Stencil fears it will disappear with the conclusion of his quest: for as long as he actively opposes V. on a cognitive level, he will also resist the regress into lethargy that is one of "her" temporal consequences.

These dual aspects of V. - the posited objective socio-historical force and the subjective psychological, linguistic and cognitive manifestations - are the concern of much of the narrative reporting of Stencil's quest; as it attempts to establish the ontological status of V. and an epistemological basis for knowledge of "her". The first historical V.-episode of the narrative is prefaced by the introduction

of precisely this dilemma.

As spread thighs to the libertine, flights of migratory birds to the ornithologist, the working part of his tool bit to the production machinist, so was the letter V to young Stencil. He would dream perhaps once a week that it had all been a dream, and that now he'd awakened to discover the pursuit of V. was merely a scholarly quest after all, an adventure of the mind, in the tradition of The Golden Bough or The White Goddess.

But soon enough he'd wake up a second, real time, to make again the tiresome discovery that it hadn't really ever stopped being the same simple-minded literal pursuit (p.61).

Thus the central question is posed: given the obsessional nature of the quest, is V. a projection or "adventure of the mind", a created mythology, or does V. exist objectively, as a real object of a "literal pursuit" that takes place in real rather than dream time? Now this problem has been formulated, in different ways, by Piers Plowman, The Faerie Queene, "Rappaccini's Daughter", The Confidence-Man and Giles Goat-Boy: it is a characteristic allegoric, figural, question. And in accord with the generic plot structure of allegory, V - having established the "fallen", entropic, condition of every set of temporal relationships, in the modern American milieu of the Whole Sick Crew, and having posed a central dilemma which arises from this situation - explores a number of interpretative modes in the attempt to find a basis for its solution. Hawthorne's, Melville's and Barth's narratives all assume initially that the object of the quest exists subjectively

and treat the possibility that it resides objectively in reality as a secondary consideration. But V, like the more "conventional" allegories of Langland and Spenser, assumes an objective existence that can be approached only through interpretation. However, rather than then proceed through a variety of formal cognitive modes - like the fable, sermon or personification - V, whilst focusing upon Stencil's manner of interpreting, directly addresses the problem of a reliable medium for discovering and communicating knowledge. Consequently, the search for an adequate cognitive basis for the definition of V. is organized around the observational nexus of the reconstructed, historical episodes - the point of view.

Richard Patteson has provided an excellent account of the epistemological dimension of Stencil's quest, in his essay "What Stencil Knew: Structure and Certitude in Pynchon's V". He suggests that three major questions be posed when considering Stencil's V.-data: who is the narrator of each episode, what is the source of their information, and how reliable is it?<sup>6</sup> For it is through the manipulation of narrative points of view that the narrative explores and tests the adequacy of firstly objective and then subjective approaches to the "truth" of V., and the key words or concepts which appear to promise some revelation of "her" nature. The episodes concerning the Whole Sick Crew are recounted by an, apparently reliable, omniscient narrator so that the identification of several key concepts which appear in this milieu, in the form of V.-symptoms, may be assumed to exist in "fact". It is in Stencil's attempt to diagnose the disease, locate its origin and formulate some prognosis, - that is, in his attempt to approach V. - that the narrative becomes ambiguous. I contend that this is due particularly to the nature of V., which is to resist all attempts to know or define "her" and to remain ineffable; but is caused also by Stencil's approach to the problem. Where a "conventional" allegoric narrative would focus

upon a development in self-knowledge - an "inner word" in Augustine's terminology - before proceeding to the identification of an external, but correspondingly "invisible", reality Stencil nurtures a "repertoire of identities. 'Forcible dislocation of personality' was what he called the general technique"(p.62). As a part of his policy of "Approach and avoid"(p.55), he evades the center to which all things seem to tend - Malta, scene of his father's death - preferring instead to project himself, through imagination, into a series of intermediate historical manifestations of V., hoping to know this "center" without ever actually and personally confronting it.

Around each seed of a dossier, therefore, had developed a nacreous mass of inference, poetic license, forcible dislocation of personality into a past he didn't remember and had no right in, save the right of imaginative anxiety or historical care, which is recognized by no one (p.62).

He begins his journey in Alexandria, with the murder of Porpentine, one of Sidney's colleagues, but

He'd only the veiled references to Porpentine in the journals. The rest was impersonation and dream. (p.63).

The single event, the culmination of a complex political conspiracy, is recounted from eight different perspectives; but the common "identity" of these narrators is indicated by the title of the chapter: "In which Stencil, a quick-change artist, does eight impersonations".

Through each guise, a set of "facts" are objectively reported, yet no single, coherent picture of the situation emerges from this combined input that could be called the whole historical truth. The perceptions of each narrator are partial, their knowledge fragmentary and incomplete - much like experiencing a four-dimensional world from a three-dimensional vantage. Yet several of the key V.-words introduced by the omniscient narrator of the opening sequences are further explored here, particularly the notion of "tourism" as a way of knowing and experiencing the world; thus providing a significant commentary upon the condition of contemporary America, in terms of a possible origin of the V.-disease that it seems to have contracted. In fact, the first of these points of view, that of Aieul the cafe waiter, introduces the concept of tourism as a way of describing, by contrast, the nature of his English customers. The difficulty of knowing, from an "objective" distance, the identity of anyone is reflected initially in the labels that Aieul gives the two Englishmen - "Fat and Tweed" - based upon the most obvious of physical characteristics. And it is elaborated in the scenarios he imaginatively creates from scraps of overheard conversation; a process that would be analogous to Stencil's construction of a V.-plot or conspiracy from random pieces of information and veiled references, if that is actually the method by which the episode is known. Alexandria is characterized as a "tourist's city", a city of such appearances which is impenetrable because it is comprised only of appearances, carefully prescribed by the tourist's equivalent of the Bible; the Baedeker tour-guide.

How wrong to expect any romance or sudden love  
 from Alexandria. No tourist's city gave that  
 gift lightly. ... Let them be deceived into  
 thinking the city something more than what their

Baedekers said it was: a Pharos long gone to earthquake and the sea; picturesque but faceless Arabs; monuments, tombs, modern hotels. A false and bastard city; inert - for "them" - as Aieul himself. (p.64).

But it is the ability of "Fat" - later identified as Porpentine - to seem "permanent" amid this landscape of the transient, to somehow belong, that distinguishes him from the tourist, according to Aieul. Like the members of the Crew - Fergus Mixolydian, the Irish Armenian Jew, comes immediately to mind - the tourist is characteristically out of place wherever he goes, a perpetual transient.

The nature of the archetypal tourist and of the whole tourist-metaphysic, is elaborated in the third "impersonation", the point of view of a citizen of Baedeker land, Maxwell Rowley-Bugge. But before this, we are provided with an account of a diplomatic gathering, at the Austrian Consulate, as witnessed by the waiter, Yusef. He introduces, in his own attitudes and sympathies, another aspect of V., that of political entropy or anarchism, and another of her key words: violence. Yusef reconciles the dual forces of "hothouse" and "Street", being a "devotee of annihilation"(p.67), with a nostalgic love for balloons. And also, in the wider context of this consulate party, the twin forces are brought together: in the threatening violence of the Fashoda Crisis and the presence of Victoria Wren, whom Yusef identifies as a "balloon-girl"(p.67). The phrase "the balloon has gone up", to indicate the onset of war, rebellion, or mass violence, is sustained throughout the narrative and is often associated with V., thus strengthening Stencil's suspicion that "V.'s natural habitat (is) the state of seige"(p.62). Fashoda provides the political and conspiratorial background to this series of "impersonations", but the narrative itself focuses upon the

exploration of a number of V.-concepts, particularly tourism and the progressive annexation of the human by the inanimate, within a general questioning of the nature of humanity. Yusef, for instance, can explain the behaviour of diplomats, who socialize together at night but wage war in the morning, only by deciding that they are not human. And he himself, as a servant, "might as well be a fixture on the wall"(p.68). This notion of the servant, public or otherwise, who is perceived purely in terms of a function, an appearance devoid of any interior reality, is the matrix within which Maxwell Rowley-Bugge forms his self-image.

As a denizen of the Baedeker world, he conceives of himself and knows that others, the tourists, see him as

... that sort of vagrant who exists, though unwillingly, entirely within the Baedeker world - as much a feature of the topography as the other automata: waiters, porters, cabmen, clerks. Taken for granted. (p.70).

Here we have another instance of that habit, already revealed by the Whole Sick Crew to be pervasive, of treating others as if they were inanimate objects - automata - deprived of their humanity in the very act of perception. This assumption lies at the center of what I have called the "tourist metaphysic": a selective perception of the world which accounts for only appearances and disregards all else. The fatal consequences of such an attitude are more fully revealed later, in connexion with Foppl's "seige party", which relives in the "hothouse" of memory von Trotha's genocidal campaign against the Hereros and Bondels - his Vernichtungs Befehl - and which analyzes the dehumanized relationship between killer and victim that originates in this assump-

tion. A concomitant result of this "touristic" mode of perception is the substitution of such a set of mechanical relationships for a moral order; the "unwritten laws of Baedeker land" of "an almost perfectly arranged tourist-state"(p.71) prevail. It is amid this exposition of the tourist mentality that we are given the first indication of the nature of V., as Victoria Wren. The link between Victoria and V. is confirmed progressively by the distinctive comb, featuring five crucified soldiers, which is the single characteristic of V. to be sustained through her many metamorphoses.

Significantly, this "indication" takes the form of Victoria's religious experience and belief. It is significant because, as William Plater argues, the evolution or temporal development of V. takes form within the conceptual context of the Catholic Church and its iconography.<sup>7</sup> V.'s evolution parallels that of Christ, as represented in Pièrs Plowman; specifically, his sequential fulfilment in the roles of Jesu, then Jesus, and finally as the conqueror, Christ. So V. evolves from Virgin and bride, to mother, to Queen, incorporating the three elements of the Trinity and becoming a force, of the same kind as this Christian Idea, but of radically different temporal manifestation. In Victoria Wren, V. exists in the aspect of the bride: she

... had indeed for a time considered the Son of God as a young lady will consider any eligible bachelor. But had realized eventually that of course he was not but maintained instead a great harem clad in black, decked only with rosaries. Unable to stand for any such competition Victoria had therefore left the novitiate after a matter of weeks but not the Church ... (p.72).

This is not to suggest that Victoria is V.: their relationship is more one of possession, in which V. possesses and gradually dominates Victoria, rather than of identity. Consequently, Victoria's rather perverse Catholicism, combined with antipodean "yarns" from her Australian uncle, form the material for a manufactured dream world, an embryonic V.-world or "colonial doll's world"(p.73), that she can control and manipulate.

So it came about that God wore a wideawake hat and fought skirmishes with an aboriginal Satan out at the antipodes of the firmament, in the name and for the safekeeping of any Victoria. (p.73).

Gradually the temporal domain of this manipulation is extended from the dream world of adolescent Victoria into reality as, through espionage and political conspiracy, the force of V. is manifest.

In fact, the following "impersonation", from the point of view of Waldetar the train conductor, juxtaposes the political and religious conceptions of conspiracy or design. Musing upon the history of Alexandria as a scene of persecution or "cataclysm" and of God's intervention, Waldetar concludes that

Whether a cataclysm is accident or design,  
they need a God to keep them safe from harm.

The storm and the earthquake have no mind.  
Soul cannot commend no-soul. Only God can ...  
Events between soul and soul are not God's  
direct province: they are under the influence  
either of Fortune, or of virtue. (p.78).

The nature of V.'s conspiratorial method becomes increasingly apparent as a reconciliation of "Fortune" and design: of using the appearance of accident to further her design. Each province becomes the domain of V.: events between "soul and soul" she controls in her aspect of individual agency or Machiavellian "virtú"; the relationship between "soul" and "no-soul" is hers in her metaphysical, deistic aspect. And her "design" is revealed through her key words - soulless "communion", non-human "decadence", the superficial perception of "tourism", the dominance of "skins" over "soul", the nostalgic "hothouse" and violent, futuristic dreams of the "Street" - to be a progressive regression or deflection from "soul" to "no-soul", to a closed, inanimate system in which entropy is triumphant and humanity is destroyed. It is the spy, Bongo-Shaftsbury who makes explicit an association between political intrigue, prosthesis and the notion of humanity as something to be destroyed. He does this in his own person: a spy who claims to be "an electro-mechanical doll" (p.80); who frightens Mildred Wren, and disturbs Porpentine, with the dramatic unveiling of his mechanical arm; and who then threatens Porpentine with death, should he ever "admit another's humanity, see him as a person and not a symbol"(p.81). The witness to this confrontation, Waldetar, is left with "a suspicion cheerless as the desert": "If they are what I think; what sort of world is it when they must let children suffer?"(p.82). The obvious suggestion is that it is a world dominated by V.

The desert-like quality of Waldetar's suspicion becomes the context in which the gradual but inexorable progress of the inanimate into the living realm is explored, by the point of view which supplants his; Gebrail, the driver. Here, the last of V.'s central concepts is introduced: the notion of disguise. Disguise is treated later in the narrative as performing a metaphoric function - central to the linguistic or semiotic attempt to identify V. - raising the problem of whether

disguise gives form to and so reveals something that would otherwise remain inapprehensible, or whether it conceals a horrible reality, something that we prefer not to apprehend. In terms of Stencil's quest, these possibilities might be formulated as: does V. make visible a transcendental force that directs modern history, or does the apparent V.-plot conceal a more terrible reality, that no plot exists at all, that history is governed only by chance and is, in any case, unrecoverable and unknowable. The nihilist Gebrail conceives of disguise in this latter function, claiming that the desert is the only reality, and the trappings of civilization to be concealing illusions: "'the city is only the desert - gebel - in disguise'"(p.83). He plays upon the homonymous relation between "Gebel, Gebrail", desert and angel, to construct a scenario in which the desert, gebel, rather than Gebrail, the Lord's angel, dictated the Koran to Mohammed, thus reducing Allah and his Paradise to "wishful thinking". And, in contrast to the "lies" that are civilization and organized religion, Gebrail interprets the desert's inexorable progress as the true apocalypse.

The only Mahdi is the desert.

Mohammed Ahmed, the Mahdi of '83, was believed by some to be sleeping not dead in a cavern near Bagdad. And on the Last Day, when the prophet Christ re-establishes el-Islam as the religion of the world he will return to life to slay Dejal the antichrist at a church gate somewhere in Palestine. The Angel Asrafil will trumpet a blast to kill everything on earth, and another to awaken the dead.

But Gebrail/Gebel, the desert's angel, had hidden all the trumpets beneath the sand. The desert was prophesy enough of the Last Day. (p.84).

Indeed, the analogous progress of V. may well be the true, though unexpected, apocalypse. Gebrail's drinking companion conceives of Fashoda as the starting point for an apocalyptic war "which will spread in all directions to engulf the world"(p.85). And a link is established between Fashoda and V., through the image of disease.

This link is, however, tentative; made by Hanne, the bierhalle waitress, as she attempts a little amateur espionage. Sensitized to the idea of conspiracy, "a certain leitmotif of disease ... had half-revealed itself, latent in the music of Cairo's afternoon; Fashoda, Fashoda"(p.90). The accuracy of her perception is undermined by the stain she discovers on a plate; of questionable reality, it is visible only in a certain focus, of shifting shape and is the "color of her headache"(p.90). Also, it is not restricted to the surface of the plate, seeming to have "transferred like an overlay to each of her retinae"(p91), so that the "triangular stain swam somewhere over the crowd, like a tongue on Pentecost"(p.92). Thus it is suggested that, if V. is analogous in some way to the Paraclete, "Fashoda" is foremost among those words which comprise her "gift of communication" - along with, perhaps, Rachel's inanimate "MG-words". Certainly, the residual effect of this word upon Hanne is to create an impression of pervasive disease and an inclination to violence: both of which are V.-qualities. But the subjectivity which colors the interpretations given to events by Hanne, by the previous "impersonation" ( Girgis, the mountebank, who sees in Porpentine his own doomed image ) in fact, by all of the "impersonations"- undermines their approach to historical truth. The actual murder of Porpentine, however, the single event which this series of "impersonations" sets out to explain, is reported from a distance kept so objective that neither the narrative point of view nor the participants in this drama are identified, and some doubt does remain about the identity of the victim: whether it was actually Porpentine who was murdered.

In this atmosphere of cognitive uncertainty, the narrative returns to the exploits of the Whole Sick Crew; to the further exploration of V.'s symptoms manifest in modern America. Here, the uncertain historical existence of these symptoms in Alexandria and Cairo is balanced by the confident tone of the omniscient narrator as he recounts the circumstances of Esther's "nose job", and the personal history of Schoenmaker. It is in the details of Schoenmaker's relationship with Evan Godolphin, during the First World War - one of Stencil's "kingdoms of death"(p.54) - that the marks of V. again appear. In the manner of Bongo-Shaftsbury's mechanical arm, Evan Godolphin's wounds are treated with "allografts: the introduction of inert substances into the living face"(p.99). Consequently, "Godolphin received a nose bridge of ivory, a cheekbone of silver and a paraffin and celluloid chin"(p.100). Outraged more by the temporary than the unnatural nature of this treatment, Schoenmaker gains from the incident his professional impetus. Gradually, however, his "sense of mission" and of responsibility is eroded, with a growing acceptance of the causes of disfigurement and satisfaction with remedying their effects. "It was in short a deterioration of purpose; a decay"(p.101) - into decadence. For Schoenmaker has a peculiarly Jacobean conception of his profession, calling it "the art of Tagliacozzi", cultivating "the Tagliacozzi look"(p.97). And the Jacobean, in Pynchon's fiction, appears as a particularly decadent era; described in The Crying of Lot 49 as: "so preapocalyptic, death-wishful, sensually fatigued".<sup>8</sup> It is a culture, like that of the Whole Sick Crew, dominated by a sense of crisis, of the imminent end of the old order, paired with a characteristic (non)-response of inertia or "conservative laziness" (p.101). So Schoenmaker becomes, what might be called, a secular agent of V., advancing through surgical prosthesis the domain of the inanimate - and the narrator leaves us in no doubt concerning the violence which necessarily attends this advance - supplanting the force of conscience

with rationalization. In Schoenmaker we have the conjunction of several V.-symptoms: violence; decadence; a "hothouse" nostalgia for the past, Jacobean age; finally, he is a rallying-point for a soulless "communion" of those who prefer "skin" to interior reality. Not surprising then is Schoenmaker's corrupting use of language. Not only does he construct euphemisms, like "cultural harmony"(p.103), to make physical incongruity acceptable but, in a notable "conversation" with Esther, erodes the distinction between the basic duality of "yes" and "no".

"No," she cried.

"You have worked on many ways of saying no. No meaning yes. That no I don't like. Say it differently."

"No," with a little moan.

"Different. Again."

"No," this time a smile, eyelids at half-mast.

"Again."

"No."

"You're getting better." (pp.109-110).

Eventually, both words lose their meanings, becoming part of the entropic homogeneity that attaches to the "Beatrices" of the "Sailor's Grave".

Profane, now an alligator hunter, discovers a similar atrophy of system in terms of the Alligator Patrol, its dwindling resources and the incapacity of the men to take pride in it; pride being a word that does not exist in the same "real" terms as "three empty beer bottles exist to be cashed in for a subway fare and warmth, someplace to sleep for awhile"(p.115). The debased condition and unreliable nature of language is revealed to Profane in his encounter with the story of "Fairing's Parish". The story is presented initially as a reliable account, only later do we learn that it exists in multiple versions and that "by the

time Profane heard them, (they) were pretty much apocryphal and more fantasy than the record warranted"(p.120). Yet Father Fairing's reponse to a perceived imminence of apocalypse, and Profane's response to his story, are significant in terms of the V.-words that appear in the account. It was during "the Depression of the '30's, in an hour of apocalyptic well-being", that Fairing decided the rats will be the inheritors of the earth and so began the process of converting them to Catholicism. He transformed an area of the New York sewer into "an enclave of light in a howling Dark Age of ignorance and barbarity"(p.119). And it is into this area of sewer that Profane pursues his unusual, pinto alligator. Both Fairing and Profane find one particular rat interesting: Veronica, "the only member of his flock Father Fairing felt to have a soul worth saving"(p.121). A passage from Fairing's Journal is quoted, concerning Veronica's literal conception of sin as an entity which pursues her, a notion that is picked up later by V. in the guise of the Bad Priest.

V. came to me tonight, upset. She and Paul have been at it again.

The weight of guilt is so heavy on the child. She almost sees it: as a huge, white, lumbering beast, pursuing her, wanting to devour her. We discussed Satan and his wiles for several hours. (p.121).

The story of Veronica, the rat who wanted to become a nun, a possible candidate for canonization to a rat saint-hood, haunts Profane as he wanders deeper into the "Parish", trying "to keep his ears closed to the sub-threshold squeakings of Veronica, the priest's old love"(p.122). Finally, he finds himself and the alligator trapped in "a wide space like the nave of a church", filled with an "uncomfortable radiance"(p.122)

an "unholy light"(p.123),

He waited. He was waiting for something to happen. Something otherworldly, of course. He was sentimental and superstitious. Surely the alligator would receive the gift of tongues, the body of Father Fairing be resurrected, the sexy V. tempt him away from murder. He felt about to levitate and at a loss to say where, really, he was (p.122).

But the Pentecostal moment is deferred; Profane shoots his alligator and is left only with the multiple stories of V.

However, Pig Bodine is given a "gift of tongues", of sorts, by the Whole Sick Crew. Rachel is not surprised by his sudden change of idiom, "after all he had been hanging around the Spoon. For the next hour they talked proper nouns"(pp.130-31). Could it be that in America, in 1956, this is V.'s "gift" to a decadent, apostatical humanity? For the key words that we have seen identified as aspects of V. - tourism, inanimation, decadence, violence, communion, hothouse and street, skin, disguise - all are reducible, in causal terms, to this linguistic condition: they are the psychological, perceptual or cognitive and social expressions of a corrupting language. The temporal force of V. is manifest, primarily, in the reduction of words to

... ambiguous tools of thought, capable not ...  
of revealing a true cognition but ... of  
generating a corruption of understanding. <sup>9</sup>

Like the "Fals" of Piers Plowman, V. operates on the linguistic

categories that are imposed upon experience and through which knowledge exists, eroding the distinctiveness of these systems by dissolving their "difference". So the distinction between "skin" and "soul" dissolves into the single perceptual principle of "appearance" employed by the tourist; the hothouse and street deflect attention from the lived moment, the "real present", which dissolves into nostalgia on the one hand or futuristic dreams on the other. But essentially V.'s design is directed toward making ambiguous the distinction between humanity and the inhuman: through prosthesis, decadence and disguise. It is a project which thus advances and exaggerates the process of entropy, in a decline which V. progressively embodies as well as directs. The concept of such an historical design moves increasingly to the center of narrative focus, as Stencil begins to suspect the existence of an unidentified "Them".

He confesses his fear of a hostile force, actively opposed to the fulfilment of his quest, to the "psychodontist" Eigenvalue who remains, however, sceptical. Yet he does allow Stencil to recount what history he has of V.

"She's yielded him only the poor skeleton of a dossier. Most of what he has is inference. He doesn't know who she is, nor what she is. ... He had discovered, however, what was pertinent to his purpose: that she'd been connected, though perhaps only tangentially, with one of those grand conspiracies or foretastes of Armageddon ... in the years preceding the Great War. V. and a conspiracy. Its particular shape governed only by the surface accidents of history at the time." (p.155).

More significant, perhaps, than Stencil's link between V. and a conspiracy is this repetition of the association between V., mass violence and the events of Apocalypse; but it is a significance which Stencil does not appear to perceive. Eigenvalue visualizes the structure of history, not in terms of any "grand conspiracy", but as a sine-wave or rippled fabric in which continuity is disguised by the modulating amplitude of the cycles. So, from the perspective of "the bottom of a fold"(p.155), any over-view is impossible - just as it is difficult to perceive a four-dimensional continuity from a three-dimensional vantage. The narrative, as it progresses, introduces several such cognitive forms, interpretative frameworks that are imposed upon the material of history, each producing a different conception of the meaning of history but not permitting the actual perception of such an over-view as Stencil seeks. Profane, for instance, formulates a sexual theory of history: "history unfolds according to economic forces and the only reason anybody wants to get rich is so he can get laid steadily, with whomever he chooses"(p.214). In this way, the narrative does consider a number of formal interpretative modes in the attempt to discover an adequate epistemological basis for the solution of Stencil's dilemma - the definition of V., the modern century's presiding genius - which is the dilemma of the entire narrative.

The notion of conspiracy is most fully explored in chapter seven where, as I have already mentioned, V. is associated not with any coherent, precise plot but with accident, cross-purposes and misinterpretation. Yet the confusion produced by the intersection of the Venus, Vheissu and Venezualan plots results in an anarchistic riot - a political expression of entropy - and in violent death; perhaps an instance of V. employing the appearance of accident to further her own design. Stencil's approach to this possible design, through the reconstruction of the Florence V.-episode, remains as tentative as was his first hist-

orical foray. Here, his sources are "inference" and "on-the-spot investigation"(p.155), although the appearance of Sidney Stencil does create the illusion of an increase in reliability and, likewise, the reappearance of Evan Godolphin and Victoria Wren produces the impression that some increase in clarity is made. But despite the uncertain reliability of the account, a development is revealed in the character of V., as Victoria Wren.

Thus far, the religious nature of V. has been described in terms of the experience of the novitiate - Victoria and Veronica in the aspect of the virgin. In this episode, however, Victoria's literal progress to the condition of "bride" is revealed; a progress which is, effectively, the extension of V. from a "colonial doll's world" into reality. Now a "self-proclaimed citizen of the world"(p.166), Victoria's "marriage" to Christ has been consummated through a series of "imperfect, mortal versions of himself"(p.167) and, in her perverse manner, she interprets these consummations in overtly figural terms as "outward and visible signs of an inward or spiritual grace belonging to Victoria alone"(p.167). The origin of her perverse religious temperament, "a nun-like temperament pushed to its most dangerous extreme"(p.167), is ambiguously located by the narrator in "some malady of the generation": a "malady" which has led "similarly-minded ladies" in Paris, to attend Black Masses. In fact, it is in Paris, in 1913, that we see V. herself participating in a Black Mass. But this progress from virgin to bride is not explicitly linked to the ongoing development of V. until later - later, when the narrator observes that "Having once accepted duality Victoria found it only a single step to Trinity"(p.199) - after the definition of V. has been expanded through her association with both Vheissu and Venus.

It is to Victoria Wren that Hugh Godolphin recounts the discovery of Vheissu, and it is an account which augments previous suggestions of

V's infernal nature. For his description of the geographical approach to Vheissu is allusive of the landscape through which Dante makes his descent into hell. The "vast tundra"(p.168), for instance, is reminiscent of the Plain of Dis covered with burning tombs, the "dolmens and temples of dead cities" reminiscent of the City of Dis; "treacherous swampland" recalls the Marsh of Styx whilst the "green lake" recalls the Well at the bottom of the Abyss; the mountains which ring Vheissu are allusive of the many mounts and precipices which Dante must climb and Vheissu's "hard blue ice" is reminiscent of the frozen Lake of Cocytus. All of these physical obstacles Dante must overcome before he reaches the center of the earth and the rocky cavern where Satan stands, just as Hugh Godolphin must in order to reach the "dead center of the carousel(p.205), which is Vheissu. There, he discovers a vision of total meaninglessness; a dream landscape - perhaps a "colonial doll's world"(p.73) - of random, kaleidoscopic color, where dreams are more real than reality: a place with no soul but only skin, like the "skin of a tattooed savage"(p.170), a place which Godolphin conceptualizes as a woman. The link between Vheissu and V. is forged initially by this shared female quality, but Vheissu possesses other V.-characteristics. Apparently comprised only of "skin", it is a "tourist's" domain, like Alexandria, and although Godolphin conceives of himself, as an explorer, as the diametric opposite of the tourist - "They want only the skin of a place, the explorer wants its heart"(p.204) - he leaves Vheissu as a tourist. For the effect upon him of this vision of an existential void, of "Nothing", is exile from the human community: Vheissu transforms him into a perpetual transient. And, in the manner which has been progressively identified as V.'s, his perception of reality is deflected into dream - dreams which appear more real than reality - as Vheissu comes to occupy the "hothouse" of his memory. The violence of V. is reflected in the "barbarity, insurrection, internicine feud" of Vheissu, and the

inanimate, that most obvious of V.'s signs, is encapsulated for Godolphin in the corpse of a spider monkey, found beneath the Antarctic ice.

A mockery, you see: a mockery of life, planted where everything but Hugh Godolphin was inanimate. With of course the implication ... It did tell me the truth about them. If Eden was the creation of God, God only knows what evil created Vheissu. The skin which had wrinkled through my nightmares was all there had ever been. Vheissu itself, a gaudy dream (p.206).

Unlike Dante, Godolphin does not discover Satan standing immobilized, frozen, but he does read the Devil's message: the knowledge of certain death and denial of eternal life.

He interprets the corpse as a sign and, like Herbert Stencil, reasons from this the existence of a sinister V.-plot. The British Foreign Office in Florence also accepts the existence of a V.-conspiracy, misinterpreting Vheissu as a code-name for Venezuela, misconstruing the intriguing of the Gaucho, a Venezuelan anarchist, who actually conspires to steal Botticelli's Birth of Venus. The Vheissu, Venus and Venezuelan plots - plots subjective, private and political - intersect to produce a "Situation" of immense complexity. But the readers are no longer restricted by the limited access of objective witnesses to the action, as we were in the Alexandrian V.-episode, our access to this situation is controlled by a narrative point of view that shifts among the minds of the characters involved in the action. Consequently, their reflections upon the significance of events in terms of a V.-conspiracy are made available. Sidney Stencil, for instance, constructs a theory of

"The Situation", deciding

... that no Situation had any objective reality: it existed in the minds of those who happened to be in on it at any specific moment. Since these several minds tended to form a sum total more mongrel than homogenous, The Situation must necessarily appear to a single observer much like a diagram in four dimensions to an eye conditioned to seeing its world in only three (p.189).

Sidney's solution to this epistemological dilemma, teamwork, knowing a "Situation" through accreting accounts of it, is the method adopted by the narrative thus far; yet it has not yielded Herbert Stencil, or us, a valid account of V.

Victoria Wren adopts individual volition or Machiavellian virtú, not as an interpretative approach to the Situation, but as an agent of it. Finding faith and the Church inadequate to her purpose, she adds to them this element of personal control which is manifest in espionage. The Alexandria episode, and her involvement with the spy Goodfellow, "had revealed to her all at once a latent talent of her own for espionage"(p.198). Victoria is attracted to political intrigue primarily because she finds "any virtue" desirable in itself, but particularly because "it became more effective the further divorced it was from moral intention"(p.198). And, as we have seen, the movement away from a coherent moral order is a characteristic effect of V. Mantissa, the Gaucho and Ferrante share Victoria's commitment to this idea of personal control, a commitment which is related by the narrator to a fin de siècle decadence, as he asks: "what was the tag-end of an age if not that sort of imbalance, that tilt toward the more devious, the less

forceful?"(p.199). Having heard Godolphin's account of Vheissu, Mantissa finally perceives such a decadence as the predominating quality of his relationship with the Botticelli Venus; his "entire love" and dream of beauty is recognized to be "a gaudy dream, a dream of annihilation" (p.210); his love to be for an inhuman mistress, a goddess of love and death. Victoria makes use of this decadence or deviouness, to achieve "the conforming of events to the channels she'd set out for them as glorious testimony to her own skill."(p.199). So the confused cluster of conspiracies culminates in a "fair of violent death, framed and staged, it seemed, for her alone"(p.209); it is a ritual of violence which William Plater interprets as a celebration of the marriage of the two orders - virtú or control and the Church, faith - which is the birth of V.<sup>10</sup> Indeed, it is the point at which Victoria shows an initial recognition of her possession by V.:

It was as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy. Inviolate and calm, she watched the spasms of wounded bodies ... (p.209).

She has been, thus far, seen in the aspects of virgin and bride; here she develops further to become a force: a demonic Holy Ghost or spiritus infernus, perhaps. This should not be surprising; as Plater points out, in its earliest forms the Holy Ghost was feminine - as the Hebrew shekinah and Roman Venus' dove<sup>11</sup> - and further, the narrative itself considers the possibility of a feminine Paraclete. V. does not forego her earlier characteristics in this development; she progresses through the accumulation of mechanisms through which her force may be manifest. The perverse V.-version of the Trinity which is promised and foreshadowed

here in Florence is not realised, however, until 1913 in Paris, when we see "V. in love".

Of course the historical V.-episodes are not presented in a chronological sequence. Between her appearance in Florence in 1899 and Paris in 1913 where V. ascends to the status of "Queen", we witness the effects of her maturity - presiding over the decadence of Foppl's seige party in 1922 - and are presented with an account of the circumstances of her death on Malta, in 1942. The effect of this dislocation in sequence is to suggest omnipresence as the condition of V.'s existence, to contrast the historical perspectives constructed by Stencil with a concept or principle which transcends the limitations of those perspectives. In other words, the historical V.-episodes are created in three dimensions whilst V. herself exists in four; in a realm outside of that of one-way or chronological time. It is this conflict which produces the impression that the manifestations of V. are in fact figurae, clues to a continuity beyond the limited perspectives of human history. This impression is strengthened by the failure of all the epistemological forms explored by the narrative to produce an adequate definition of V., and also by her continuing influence upon American society in 1956, despite her physical death, which is revealed in the episodes concerning the Whole Sick Crew.

The "contemporary" sequence that is juxtaposed with the Florence episode, for instance, returns to three important V.-words that were explored there: the concepts of the inanimate, decadence and conspiracy. The inanimate principle is dealt with largely by Profane, a self-confessed "schlemihl" who lives, despite himself, a constant battle with the inanimate. For he is, in a sense, partially inanimate himself: a "yoyo" whose movement on the "street of the 20th century" is only an illusion of movement or progress; "it would always seem maybe he was looking for something too to make the fact of his own disassembly

plausible as that of any machine"(p.40). Possessed of a vocabulary of "wrong words" and the desire to be treated as an object - preferably of mercy - he deals with interpersonal relationships as if they were, somehow, inanimate. Women, particularly, he thinks of - fantasises about - in mechanical terms, describing Rachel as "a true wind-up woman", "like an automatic card-dealing machine"(p.216), as if she were a prototype of what we will discover V. to be. Most of the Crew share Profane's attitudes and characteristics - "yoyoing" is their particular hobby - but Rooney Winsome is the only member who has a self-conscious awareness of their decadence, thinking of them all as "products of a decky-dance".

Winsome, self-proclaimed king of it, felt  
 only sorry it should ever have happened.  
 How it happened, how anybody, himself  
 included, had contributed to it he didn't  
 know (p.221).

It is the etiology of this decadence, this V.-disease, that Stencil alone attempts to discover; he seeks the knowledge of why and how it happened, and how anybody - but V. specifically - had contributed to it. The difficulty of his quest is again underlined by a narratorial assertion of the relativity of historical perception.

People read what news they wanted to and  
 each accordingly built his own rathouse of  
 history's rags and straws. In the city of  
 New York alone there were at a rough estimate  
 five million different rathouses (p.225).

Although Stencil does not himself conceive of the impulse behind his quest as the diagnosis of this disease which afflicts his society and his century, he does begin to think of V. in transcendent and apocalyptic terms, as a principle which is manifest in such discrete "rathouses" but is not restricted to any one of them; as a conspiracy of immense and pervasive proportions.

To go along assuming that Victoria the girl tourist and Veronica the sewer rat were one and the same V. was not at all to bring up any metempsychosis: only to affirm that his quarry fitted in with The Big One, the century's master cabal, in the way Victoria had with the Vheissu plot and Veronica with the new rat-order. If she was a historical fact then she continued active today and at the moment, because the ultimate Plot Which Has No Name was as yet unrealized (p.226).

The structure of the narrative, with its juxtaposition of historical and contemporary sequences, suggests that V. is indeed an historical fact, perhaps even the apocalyptic "Big One" itself. We must keep in mind the rhetorical gap which is sustained between the information available to the characters and the narrative account of this which is provided for the reader. The apocalyptic quality of V. and of the "conspiracy" that she suggests, is a quality recognised not only by the characters in the action but also by the apparently reliable omniscient narrator. So despite the "Stencilised" nature of the reconstructed V.-episodes, the realisation of this "ultimate Plot Which Has No Name" as Apocalypse is a possibility that must be seriously entertained. And yet

the ultimate realization of this "Plot" is not the primary concern of the narrative, which focuses instead upon its origin and nature.

Stencil's account of the progress of V., and her temporal design, in Southwest Africa, in 1922, reveals a further exploration of the objective mode of discovering and communicating knowledge. It is, in fact, the culmination of this aspect of the narrative's epistemological theme. Mondaugen is the single witness to and reporter of the action, but the reliability of his account is seriously undermined by the progressive interiorization of his point of view, as his story shifts from an objective first person narrative concerned with the facts of his situation to a gradual predominance of impressions and then fantasy and imaginative speculation. His professional function, to record "atmospheric radio disturbances: sferics for short"(p.230), further undermines his reliability by suggesting a tendency to seek pattern where there may be none. But through Mondaugen's story we discover the effects of V. in "mirror-time in the South-West Protectorate"(p.230): the "mirror-time" of a "mirror-world" which formed the subject of Rachel's earlier speculations.

The presence of V. in this "world" is first signalled by the phrase used to indicate the onset of native rebellion: "So the balloon's gone up, Mondaugen"(p.232). Indeed, she appears in the persona of Vera Meroving, Victoria Wren's desire to shape historical events to the form of her own choosing, through her virtú, now reified in Vera's elaborate clock eye. This reification embodies the shift in V.'s activities, from her Florentian interlude where violence was the predominating V.-quality of events, to the centrality here of one of V.'s more "historical" characteristics: the "hothouse" conception of time. For, as Mondaugen quickly discovers, the center of activity in Foppl's "siege party" is the reconstruction in "words and perhaps in deed"(p.240) of von Trotha's genocidal campaign of 1904. But as Mondaugen also dis-

covers, the distinction between word and deed is one difficult to sustain within the context of this decadence - a dissolution of distinctions which is as characteristically V.'s as is the deflection away from reality to "hothouse" dreams of the past. The decadence of the siege party defines itself for Mondaugen as an analogy to Munich at Fasching, "a city dying of abandon, venality"(p.236). He dreams of being led through Munich's streets by Vera Meroving, streets populated by faces which bear the marks of the V.-disease: "white faces, like diseased blooms, bobbed along in the dark as if moved by other forces toward some graveyard, to pay homage at an important burial"(p.244). It is, however, his dreaming which casts doubt upon the validity of his entire account. Mondaugen conceives of himself, in the role of witness to the siege party, as a voyeur; subsequently, the disturbing problem occurs to him: "that if dreams are only waking sensation first stored and later operated on, then the dreams of a voyeur can never be his own"(p.255). This dilemma is progressively realised as an inability to distinguish between the actors in this drama, as the sources of his information, and a concomitant difficulty in distinguishing interior from external reality. And so he confuses the respective "hothouses" of Foppl and Hugh Godolphin.

The reappearance of old Godolphin and the resumption of his relationship with Vera/Victoria is the major link between the two V.-personae. And the "conspiracy" that Mondaugen has suspected, existing in a latent and unacknowledged form between Vera and himself coalesces and takes tangible form around the figure of Godolphin. For in a way that Mondaugen could not know, she manipulates events and moulds Mondaugen himself into a wraith of Evan Godolphin, in order to recreate the atmosphere of Florence; to conquer and possess Hugh by drawing him into the "hothouse" of Vheissu, permanently. She operates upon the tentative distinction between memory and present reality, a distinction

rapidly and entropically declining as the siege party goes on. Vera draws an explicit analogy between Vheissu and the current *siège*, or rather Foppl's recreation of 1904, trying to recall and recreate it in Godolphin's present memory: "Don't you see? This *siège*. It's Vheissu. It's finally happened"(p.248). His resistance, though brief, is significantly based on a distinction between private and public dreams: arguing that such subjective dreams as Vheissu are no longer possible, he claims that once dreams become public they cease to be dreams and become instead terrible realities, their "need", "its void", is filled with "The real thing. Unfortunately"(p.248). Godolphin's resistance is inevitably brief; the pressure of nostalgia applied by Vera and the pressure simply exerted by the "hothouse" context within which he is living exert their effect upon his tremulous set of distinctions; Mondaugen becomes his long-lost son Evan and Mondaugen, in his turn, cannot distinguish the recollections of Godolphin from those of Foppl, with any absolute clarity: "Mondaugen could at least note that though the events were Foppl's, the humanity could easily have been Godolphin's" (p.255). Foppl comes increasingly to define his guests by prescribing their "common dream"; the dream of 1904.

It is in the account of von Trotha's genocidal campaign against the Herero and Hottentot tribes that the practical consequences of V.'s "metaphysic" are set out at length. Here, the key V.-words intersect to produce a situation in which humanity is defeated and replaced by the inhuman. The process of dehumanization takes the initial form of "liberation" from the constraints of moral imperatives, supplanted by

... comfort, the luxury; when you knew  
 you could safely forget all the rote-  
 lessons you'd had to learn about the value  
 and dignity of human life (p.253).

This freedom is quickly translated into the practical terms of "functional agreement" or "operational sympathy", the attitude that "you were in no sense killing"(p.261). And with this attitude the natives are reduced to objects, automata, in the act of perception which conceives them only in terms of a function: the function of the victim. Consequently, the sense of "luxury" degenerates into boredom, violence is no longer the corollary to rage but a mechanical act. Even the annoyance which accompanies a sense of futility borne of "the knowledge that this is only one unit in a seemingly infinite series, that killing this one won't end it "(p.263), even the boredom of repetitive, mechanical extermination is not sustained. An awareness of a kind of natural order takes over, so that the act of killing assumes a new significance: "It had only to do with destroyer and the destroyed, and the act which united them"(p.264). From this sense of structure, "a set symmetry, a dancelike poise"(p.264), and subsequent emotional peace, there is no return; it is the point at which a coherent, humane moral order is finally and irrevocably replaced with an inhuman relationship in which "soul and soul"(p.78) become "victimizers and victims, screwers and screwees"(p.49), as Rachel perceives it in modern New York. The "touristic" mode of perception, of appearances and functions alone, with violence as a catalyst, produces a set of inhuman or decadent, inanimate relationships, a "symmetry" where entropy triumphs over humanity. And the events of 1904, in terms of their colonial, political policy, are events of the "street"; this genocidal extermination of natives a necessary historical stage, a function of the future, the glory of an empire; and so form the stuff of "hothouse" dreams.

The reliability of Mondaugen's account is, however, highly ambiguous. He relives 1904 as an unnamed soldier of von Trotha's army but this first-person narrative is interspersed with events of 1922. Like Stencil, his information is based upon recollection, augmented

with dreams and speculation and presented as a "dislocation of person-ality". His scurvy-induced fever suggests the possibility that it is all simple hallucination; yet if his source is in fact Foppl, then the interpretation Mondaugen makes of his account is open to question - Mondaugen does, after all, leave the siege party with "those first tentative glandular pressures that one day develop into moral outrage" (p.277). Together with the ambiguous role of Hugh Godolphin as a source of information, they form multiple points of view, similar to those which reported the Florence V.-episode, but further internalized, located within the single mind of Mondaugen rather than in the narrative itself, which earlier shifted among the minds of the characters involved in the action. And then, the entire story is "Stencilised"; attention is drawn to this fact by the interruptions made by Eigenvalue as he listens to Stencil's retelling of it, making sceptical enquiries as to its validity.

But the role of V. - Stencil's center of interest - is peripheral to the recollection of 1904, operating instead upon the "hothouse" recreation of it. The influence of V. is apparent in the V.-concepts that characterize the entire episode and these sub-categories are more clearly defined as a result. But, in the way Mondaugen characterizes Vera, V. herself remains ambivalent, through

... her inability to come to rest anywhere  
inside plausible extremes, her nervous,  
endless motion ... but finally making,  
having made, sense only as the dynamic  
uncertainty she was ... (p.256).

This "uncertainty" is reflected in the diverse geographical appearances that Vera seems to have made: Florence, Southwest Africa, Munich one

Fasching; suggesting that perhaps it is she whom Mondaugen identifies when he identifies the nature of the seige party as "a soul-depression which must surely infest Europe as it infested this house", and his own involvement in it in terms of a curse laid on him one Fasching: "to become surrounded by decadence no matter what exotic region ... he wandered into"(p.277). The notion of decadence as a disease and a disease that is spreading, obviously relates this episode to V., and Mondaugen's experience to that of contemporary America, to the Whole Sick Crew particularly. As Richard Patteson observes: "The veld, one might say, is die Welt".<sup>12</sup>

In fact, Stencil explicitly relates the Crew at the Rusty Spoon club to "the Crew at Foppl's, saw here the same leprous pointillism of orris root, weak jaws and bloodshot eyes"(p.296). But it is Eigenvalue who locates the linguistic basis of this decadence, the use of words to replace rather than express "Thought".

Conversations at the Spoon had become little more than proper nouns, literary allusions, critical or philosophical terms linked in certain ways. (p.297).

This sort of arranging and rearranging was Decadence, but the exhaustion of all possible permutations and combinations was death (p.298).

Eigenvalue takes consolation in teeth and metal which endure; but they endure for the very reason that they already embody the inanimate symmetry to which everything apparently is declining. The principle of the inanimate underlies the Crew's linguistic assumptions and is, from this basis, manifest in all other areas of human activity. But the assumption that man is essentially a mechanism is most fully revealed

to Profane in his encounter with the anthropomorphized mannikins SHOCK and SHROUD.

These mannikins embody the conception of man as a thing which can be defined in terms of "a clockwork automaton", "a heat-engine, about 40 per cent efficient" or "something which absorbs X-rays, gamma rays and neutrons"(p.284). The prophecy that Profane receives from SHROUD is a more explicit statement of the V.-design that has been suggested throughout the narrative: that SHOCK and SHROUD are but early prototypes of what humanity will become. Von Trotha's extermination of the Herero and Hottentot tribes foreshadows the Nazi extermination of Jews; that both are based upon the perception of a race of men as essentially inanimate is revealed in SHROUD's analogy: "Thousands of Jewish corpses, stacked up like those poor car-bodies. Schlemihl: It's already started" (p.295). More insidious, however, are the individual incursions of the inanimate, and the sophisticated rationalizations made by such as Schoenmaker. Using a perverse interpretation of Platonism, he constructs an image of prosthesis as the union of - or perhaps confusion of - the physical and ideal, the body and the soul, which is designed to deflect attention from the "soul" to the material: "Her soul would be there on the outside, radiant, unutterably beautiful". But with a commonsense kind of clarity Esther cuts through this euphemistic theorizing to ask: "Who are you ... to say what my soul looks like"(p.297).

The nature of the relationship between the visible and the invisible is the primary subject of the following V.-episode, the confessions of Fausto Majistral. Following the exploration of "tourism" in Alexandria, violence in Florence and the "hothouse" in Southwest Africa, the central V.-concept explored here is disguise or metaphor: a concept obviously central to establishing the ontological and epistemological status of V., and also the nature of Stencil's quest, which attempts to discover a true, though metaphoric, history informed by V. Unlike

Schoenmaker, who argues that prosthesis - a species of metaphor - makes visible that which otherwise remains imperceptible, Fausto conceives of metaphor as a form of disguise. And, for the first time in the narrative the interpretation of a key V.-concept, by a character, is explicitly related to a set of causal linguistic assumptions. Fausto shares the attitude of the Egyptian driver, the nihilist Gebrail, but for different reasons; his awareness of the gap between reality and discourse, which metaphor attempts to bridge, is founded upon his knowledge of the arbitrary nature of language.

As a product of British colonialism, educated in two languages - Maltese and English - Fausto is particularly aware of the perceptual constraints imposed by language. He remarks, for instance, upon the absence of nuances from the Maltese language, which are a part of English, and relates this absence to a way of perceiving the world, one tending toward "peace and simplicity". But speaking, and thinking, in both languages, Fausto conceives of himself as "a dual man; aimed in two ways at once", torn between the two cognitive modes:

To be merely Maltese: endure almost mindless,  
without sense of time? Or to think -  
continuously - in English, to be too aware of  
war, of time, of all the grays and shadows of  
love? (p.309).

As one result of this dilemma, Fausto describes the development of his personality - through four stages to the time of writing his "confession" - in terms of his changing attitude towards, and use of, language. So the youthful Fausto I is characterised by a love of Elizabethan phrases and high-flown rhetoric, Shakespeare and T.S.Eliot; whilst Fausto II, a product of the siege of Malta, during the Second World War, is "more

Maltese and less British"(p.314), and yet his earlier optimism and love of rhetoric is replaced with a fascination for the conceptual; he is a "young man in retreat"(p.311), a retreat from a pantheistic religious awareness into religious abstraction and poetry. "Moving towards that island-wide sense of communion. And at the same time towards the lowest form of consciousness"(p.315). It is a communion in "Purgatory", poetry dominated by a sense of "slow apocalypse"(p.316), and a retreat into non-humanity. As Fausto III begins to emerge, abstraction gives way to a "sensitivity to decadence" or inanimation.

Decadence, decadence. What is it? Only a clear movement toward death or, preferably, non-humanity. Fausto II and III ... like any dead leaf or fragment of metal they'd be finally subject to the laws of physics. All the time pretending it was a great struggle between the laws of man and the laws of God (p.321).

This progress is encapsulated in the development of "the Siege poetry": "From the quick to the inanimate"(p.320). Poetry itself is regarded here as the poet's communication with his own senses - similar to the silent music produced by the Duke di Angelis quartet in "Entropy" - forming a closed psychic circuit, the kind of closed system in which entropy - "the laws of physics" - accelerates. And it is at this stage that Fausto discovers what he conceives to be "life's single lesson: that there is more accident to it than a man can ever admit to in a lifetime and stay sane"(pp.320-21). He perceives also a link between such accident, decadence and matriarchy, a relation based upon the proximity of mothers to the accidental nature of reproduction, "a random

conjunction of events", and to the inanimate foetus, "the zygote has no soul. Is matter"(p.321). Consequently, he reasons, a myth of motherhood is constructed, an arbitrary but protective metaphor which compensates for "an inability to live with the truth"(p.322). However, it is in his encounter with the woman who embodies these qualities - the progress to the inanimate, decadence and metaphor - V., in the guise of the Bad Priest, that Fausto III is born.

The "confession" itself is an attempt to articulate this encounter, but it is an account written with a self-conscious awareness of the fictive nature of metaphor and metaphoric constructions, such as "motherhood" and history. The question whether metaphor be "a thrust at truth" or a lie (The Crying of Lot 49,p.95), is a question central to Pynchon's fiction, the whole enterprise of allegory and, specifically, the definition of V. - as the Lady V. and the V.-history which Stencil seeks. In fact, Fausto's attempt to write his experience of the Bad Priest, of V., constitutes a V.-history. But Fausto takes a highly relativistic approach to history, assuming that reality simply is and that any conceptualisation of it is metaphoric, formed in alchemical memory: "The word is, in sad fact, meaningless, based as it is on the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous"(p.307). In the attempt to overcome the inevitable alterations made by memory and produce a valid account of his experience, Fausto works upon the journals of his previous personalities, interpreting, rejecting, then reinterpreting them, trying to capture an objective truth which constantly eludes his subjective formulations. He concedes that "The writing itself even constitutes another rejection, another 'character' added to the past"(p.306). He is left with a history that is a "fiction of continuity, the fiction of cause and effect, the fiction of a humanized history endowed with 'reason'" (p.306). We must remember that this is the attitude of Fausto IV, who is still tainted with the characteristics of the non-human Fausto III,

the successor who came into being once Fausto III "passed a certain level in his slow return to consciousness or humanity"(p.307). So the narrative point of view of this episode bears the marks of his encounter with V. And it is, as we have seen, the nature of V. to encourage an historical perspective which denies the capacity of any cognitive mode to retrieve, reveal or make knowable an historical continuity, particularly a history in which she participates.

V. appears on Malta as the Bad Priest, rumoured to be "excommunicated, confederates with the Dark One"(p.313). The link between the Bad Priest and the previous avatars of V. is established initially in the instruction he provides Elena, Fausto's wife. As in the conception of Veronica, the sewer rat, sin is cast in metaphoric form as a pursuing, evil spirit, "alien, parasitic, attached like a black slug to her soul" (p.314). And, following both Veronica and Victoria, the Bad Priest advises Elena to enter the novitiate, arguing that Christ is her proper husband, that only he would welcome her "disease": "It had been His mission on earth as now, a spiritual husband in heaven, to know sickness intimately, love it, cure it. This was parable, the Bad Priest told her, metaphor for spirit's cancer"(p.314). But the priest does not take into account the literal nature of the Maltese language, nor the literal manner of interpretation that it gives rise to. Subsequently, Elena, who assumes sin to be a natural function, constantly searches herself for progressive symptoms of this disease and forgets all ideas of the novitiate. Yet what consistent philosophy there is in the Bad Priest's instruction centers upon advising girls to become nuns and boys to strive to become like "the rock of their island ... beautiful and soulless".

"God is soulless?" speculated Father Avalanche.

Having created souls, He Himself has none? So

that to be like God we must allow to be  
 eroded the soul in ourselves. Seek  
 mineral symmetry, for here is eternal  
 life: the immortality of rock. Plausible.  
 But apostasy." (p.340).

Encapsulated here is the apostasy which V. represents; directing, encouraging and embodying a decline towards closed systems in which entropy eventually triumphs, deflecting attention away from matters of the soul. The Maltese children further identify the nature of the Bad Priest as V., by likening "him" to disease, to the V.-disease which we have seen progressively diagnosed throughout the narrative. These children, "adept at metaphor", interpret the falling bombs of the siege as "pustules, blemishes and marks of pestilence"(p.339) on the face of God; but rather than attribute these symptoms to God himself, they are seen as signs of the "sky's betrayal": "knavery of the skin which could harbour such germs and thus turn so against its divine owner"(p.339). Consequently, they transfer to the Bad Priest, "parishless, an alien", "a similar infection"(p.339). Here, the disease which is V. is implicitly related to a satanic, perhaps apocalyptic design - "slow apocalypse" - which stands directly counter to the Christian conception of God and his sacred design.

The extent to which V. has come to embody physically - through prosthesis - the nature of the entropic process which she directs, is revealed in the circumstances of her death. Trapped beneath a fallen beam, during a bombing raid, the curious children literally dismantle her; removing first a wig, to reveal a Crucifixion tattooed on the scalp, then an artificial foot, followed by a set of false teeth and "a glass eye with the iris in the shape of a clock"(p.343), digging with a bayonet the star sapphire from her navel. As Fausto administers the

sacrament of Extreme Unction, she is said to be "past speech", uttering only cries, non-human cries that sound like "the wind blowing past any dead reed"(p.344). Indeed, V. now, and as the Bad Priest, is a "hollow man"; even her corpse is "object's cold, nothing human"(p.344)-about it at all. It is this cold, this encounter, which is the impulse of Fausto's "confession". Its immediate effect is to create Fausto III, an indecipherable, gibbering entity who has "no further need of God". Fausto IV, the present writer, still feels God to be "at this moment far away"(p. 345). This religious awareness colors the entire narrative as he writes it and informs his relativistic approach to metaphor.

So that while others may look on the laws of physics as legislation and God as a human form with beard measured in light-years and nebulae for sandals, Fausto's kind are alone with the task of living in a universe of things which simply are, and cloaking that innate mindlessness with comfortable and pious metaphor so that the "practical" half of humanity may continue in the Great Lie ... (p.326).

Without the awareness of metaphysical forces as real and active, and without a conception of language as the medium which can signify and make apprehensible these realities, it is suggested, then history becomes a series of discrete moments, reality merely physical facts and metaphor a lying form of disguise. This is precisely the form of perception that V. encourages by opposing all coherent cognitive, linguistic, social and moral systems, by subjecting them to the process of entropic dissolution.

It is the attitude explored in the "contemporary" sequence which is juxtaposed with this V.-episode. Much of the Whole Sick Crew's attention here is focused upon Esther's pregnancy. Slab advises an abortion, arguing that the foetus has no soul, "A complex protein molecule, is all"(p.354), and responding to Esther's objection that abortion constitutes murder with: "'You've turned R.C. Good show. For some reason it always becomes fashionable in a decadence'"(p.353). But it is to a Catholicism of V.'s perverse kind that they subscribe, if at all; the V.-quality of their decadence is apparent as they argue "Like a drunk with dry heaves: having brought up and expelled all manner of old words which had always, somehow, sat wrong", they resort to yelling so that "it ceased being logical and phony and became emotional and phony"(p.354). Unlike Elena Majistral, Esther needs no Bad Priest, no avatar of V., to advise abortion, the attitudes of V. have become internalised, are now a set of common cultural assumptions. And so Profane, despite the warning from SHOCK and SHROUD, despite his unwillingness to have Rachel prove "inanimate as the rest"(p.359), still conceives of women as essentially inanimate objects, chemically-controlled mechanisms, and prays "Someday, please God, there would be an all-electric woman. Maybe her name would be Violet"(p.385). He is, unknowingly, an agent of V., depriving others of their humanity through his mode of perception and his schlemihl-like inability to give, only to take, from Fina and Rachel particularly. Despite the antagonism of the inanimate world, he is a closed, partially inanimate, system, refusing to participate in any interdependent relationships and satisfied to simply assimilate aspects of others into his autonomous system; to be treated as an object of mercy. And it is only to this extent that he involves himself with the Whole Sick Crew.

Yet it is Profane whom Stencil chooses to involve in his quest for V., recounting to him the V.-history that he has pieced together,

though in brief: "V. in Spain, V. on Crete: V. crippled in Corfu, a partisan in Asia Minor. ... in Rotterdam she had commanded the rain to stop. It had." All the while developing "a certain magic of her own", so that one of her companions is discovered "discussing the shadows of clouds with a sheep. His hair had become white, his mental age roughly five. V. had fled."(p.388). In this account, V. approximates the primary attributes of the Antichrist: disguise, metamorphosis, the capacity to defy every natural law. But Stencil does not think of V. as a single figure, "Not the War, nor the socialist tide which brought us Soviet Russia. Those were symptoms, that's all."(p.386); yet the etiology of these "symptoms" is also the etiology of V., and through the progress of these historical manifestations "something monstrous had been building".

Profane is also audience to Stencil's recollection of the following V.-episode, set in Paris in 1913. Here, Stencil's source is Porcépic the composer, who remains peripheral to the action, much like the objective witnesses of the earliest V.-episode, whose description of "V. in love" is a "well-composed and ageless still-life"(p.409). Doubt is cast upon the validity of this reconstructed account not only by Stencil's translation of Porcépic's "still-life" into narrative form but also by the explicit naming of V., and the manner in which the narrative names her: "If we've not already guessed, 'the woman' is, again, the lady V. of Stencil's mad time-search. No one knew her name in Paris"(p.406). Stencil appears to have become more obvious in dealing with the unreliable nature of his V.-information, as he begins to fear the character of what he may eventually discover: "something monstrous" that he does not want to know. For here in Paris the perverse V.-Trinity that was foreshadowed in Florence is realized. Consequently, Stencil perceives the final triumph of V. over Victoria,

that Victoria was being gradually replaced

by V.; something entirely different,  
 for which the young century had as yet  
 no name. We all get involved to an  
 extent in the politics of slow dying,  
 but poor Victoria had become intimate  
 also with the Things in the Back Room  
 (p.410).

He interprets this "possession" and its development as the ironic failure of Victoria's dreams of personal control, of shaping events through her virtú, seemingly unaware that its political expression, espionage, has been and will continue to be an important mechanism through which V.'s, and hence Victoria's, force is manifest in reality. But in this episode, the V.-concepts which have been explored throughout the narrative as the linguistic, cognitive and social consequences of V.'s expanding influence, are dealt with as they relate to sexuality, forming the sexual dimension of the emerging V.-metaphysic. For it is in her relationship with Mélanie l'Heuremaudit, "la fétiche", that V., having progressed from virgin to bride, assumes the status of "Mother". And as "Mother", V. corresponds not to the Christian Idea of God-the-Father, but more to the Paraclete cast in feminine form, a pervasive force.

The suitability of Mélanie as the partner to V.'s visual fetish is revealed in Itague's reflections, in his conception of Mélanie as a kind of mirror reflecting such a pervasive force; a "ghost", "'Cast in the image of what? Not God. ... his name is unknown. Or if known then he is Yaweh and we are all Jews, for no one will ever speak it.'" (p.399). Her tendency to function as a mirror is combined with a sexual preference for the inanimate, seen initially in her simulation of intercourse with a plaster dummy, which she watches in an overhead mirror. And her relationship with V. - described by Itague as an automaton - whilst of this kind, is further removed from the physical, based upon a purely

visual fetish. So the Trinity which V. now embodies is reified in the image of "V. on the pouf, watching Mélanie on the bed; Mélanie watching herself in the mirror; the mirror-image perhaps contemplating V. from time to time."(p.409). It is a relationship which expresses the "decadence" that Itague perceives as their historical context:

"A decadence ... is a falling away from what is human, and the further we fall the less human we become. Because we are less human, we foist off the humanity we have lost on inanimate objects and abstract theories."(p.405).

But it is more decadent than this; for rather than anthropomorphise inert objects, Mélanie and V. impersonate the inanimate. Yet both forms of decadence serve the same ultimate design: the annexing of the human by the "Kingdom of Death"(p.411). V. recognises "the fetish of Mélanie and the fetish of herself to be one. As all inanimate objects, to the one victimized by them, are alike"(p.410). And so their relationship represents "the single melody, banal and exasperating" of Romanticism at its most decadent: liebestod, "'the act of love and the act of death are one'"(p.410).

In this way, "the Kingdom of Death is served by fetish-construct-ions like V.'s, which represent a kind of infiltration."(p.411). It is the infiltration of present reality, or "the world as it has evolved", by another world, a "parallel society", which is most fully realised as the "tourist-metaphysic". In fact, the narrator claims that V. has discovered love in the "tourist" world, a two-dimensional world comprised only of "skin", devoid of any depth or spiritual dimension - "soul".

This is a curious country, populated only by



a breed called "tourists". Its landscape is one of inanimate monuments and buildings; near-inanimate barmen, taxi-drivers, bellhops, guides ... More than this it is two-dimensional, as is the Street, as are the pages and maps of those little red handbooks. ... Tourism thus is supranational, like the Catholic Church, and perhaps the most absolute communion we know on earth ... they share the same landscapes, suffer the same inconveniences; live by the same pellucid time-scale. They are the Street's own (p.408-9).

Here, the major V.-words of the narrative are syncretically related, and so reveal themselves to be aspects of the V.-metaphysic, identified now as the "Kingdom of Death" which, through V., is a function of modern history; the "street of the 20th Century". Working, initially, through the structure of the Catholic Church, V. has created, or symbolises the creation of, an alternate "communion" which possesses its own cognitive or perceptual mode - that of the tourist - a characteristic preference for the artificial or cosmetic; its own political philosophy, based upon futuristic dreams or "hothouse" memories and both realised through the deviousness of espionage or the violence of revolution; in short, a communion expressed through decadence and predicated on a clear, and partially willed, progress towards the non-human. The reaction away from present or lived reality, which is the basic impulse beneath this progress, is a reaction in the direction of death. And as the narrator points out, the establishment of "the inanimate Kingdom" will eventually include the personal death of V. Perhaps in response to some awareness of this, the narrator speculates, she would become "a purely determined organism, an automaton, constructed, only quaintly,

of human flesh"(p.411). For the "Kingdom of Death" is served by the very fear of death itself and the attempt to preserve the body through prosthesis or by incorporating bits of inert matter, which resist decay. But, of course, we have already witnessed the physical death of V., and in this near-inanimate form. Thus, it is suggested, the establishment of "the inanimate Kingdom" on earth, in contemporary society, has reached a late stage.

The violence which is an important aspect of V.'s temporal manifestation, greets the performance of Porcépic's ballet, Rape of the Chinese Virgins (L'Enlèvement des Vierges Chinoises). Here, the "Sacrifice of the Virgin" is realised literally, in a fatal confusion of the literal and metaphoric, performance and reality, as Mélanie falls victim to the inanimate: "she might have become confused in this fetish-world and neglected to add to herself the one inanimate object that would have saved her."(p.414). Consequently, she is impaled, in what William Plater reads as a ritualistic sacrifice to V. Performed in August, he interprets this ballet as a version of the Feast of the Virgin's Assumption, also celebrated in August, which marks V.'s final transition to the status of "Queen"<sup>13</sup>; henceforth to reign over decadence in Malta and Southwest Africa, wherever her kingdom, the Kingdom of Death, should establish itself.

The extent of her influence, in 1956, is apparent in a world "going to hell", with "The jolly, jolly balloon ... going up"(p.434), and perhaps symbolized, in Valletta, by "Kilroy": a schlemihl, a metaphor which has ingratiated itself with the human world and "sprung into life, in truth, as part of a band-pass filter"(p.436). The "animated", paradoxically, springs into "life" as a piece of machinery and, as "a masterful disguise" perhaps hints at but still conceals the metaphoric nature of humanity itself: disguising an essential inanimation. The confused quality of metaphor in a V.-dominated world is reflected in

Stencil's continuing inability to define her precise significance. After recounting to Fausto his accumulated V.-history, Stencil suspects that "it did add up only to the recurrence of an initial and a few dead objects"(p.445). But that this is not his only suspicion, nor the most sincere one, is revealed in his perception of events as "ordered into an ominous logic"(p.449), which may be the "something monstrous" that he has seen building in modern history. Certainly, his "obsession" becomes more desperate, more fearful, as he senses the presence of V. pervading the streets of Valletta. He can explain Profane's sudden fever only as possession, by the Devil, by V. Fausto refuses to perform the exorcism requested by Stencil, observing that "One would have to exorcise the city, the island ... The continents, the world. Or the western part"(p. 451). He thus appears to confirm Stencil's suspicion that V. exists as an objective force, operating through history and pervading reality like a malignant cancer; the suspicion that

V.'s is a country of coincidence, ruled by a ministry of myth, whose emissaries haunt this century's streets. Porcépic, Mondaugen, Stencil père, this Majistral, Stencil fils. If the coincidences are real then Stencil has never encountered history at all, but something more appalling (p.450).

But Stencil, finally, is unable to decide the ontological status of V., and, be ~~she~~ a subjective "adventure of the mind"(p.61) or an objective reality, he refuses to articulate his suspicion, the conclusion of his quest, in any terms clearer than these. Like the "lightning-heads" of Gravity's Rainbow, Stencil possesses an intuitive knowledge of another world, a V.-world.

Between congruent and identical there seems to be another class of look alike that only finds the lightning-heads. Another world laid down on the previous one and to all appearances no different. Ha-ha! But the lightning-struck know, all right! Even if they may not know they know. <sup>14</sup>

Similarly, Stencil knows V. in a way which cannot be expressed through any of the cognitive forms explored in the narrative; because, as I argue, of the erosive effect of V. upon those systems. But it is also a wilful refusal by Stencil to decide, to choose between the possibilities and formulate a definition of V. His refusal to do so is based upon fear, fear that the "sense of animateness" he discovers through the quest will disappear with its conclusion; the fear that it will be revealed as only a sense of life after all and in reality an elaborate disguise of essential inanimateness. So Stencil leaves Malta for Stockholm, still searching for V.-clues in what is becoming an increasingly futile quest. As a result of his refusal to end the search, to come to some definition of V., the plot structure is attenuated: the epiphanic moment does not arrive; it is left to the reader to determine the nature of the narrative's spiritual dimension. And so it is, in the manner characteristic of allegory, open-ended, structured in such a way which demands this kind of response from the reader.

But a movement towards closure, towards defining the spiritual or ontological nature of V., is made in the Epilogue. Here, the narrative approaches V. more closely than Stencil ever dares, through the point of view of Sidney Stencil; and likewise, the key V.-words are brought into a closer conjunction than previously. Particularly, the nature of metaphor and its relation to the epistemological status of the V.-

disease are discussed in explicit terms. The sailor Mehemet, for instance, claims that the world, like an individual, is dying of old age; that the only change possible is toward death, in a constant progression of decay, and that civilization and the crises of politics simply disguise this inexorable process. It is Sidney Stencil, however, who casts this development in the terms of a disease.

... suppose instead sometime between 1859 and 1919, the world contracted a disease which no one ever took the trouble to diagnose because the symptoms were too subtle - blending in with the events of history, no different one by one but altogether - fatal (p.461).

David Richter has identified the significance of 1859 as the year in which both Marx's Critique of Political Economy and Darwin's Origin of the Species were published, thus marking the inception of a mechanistic image of man and society.<sup>15</sup> This conception of humanity characterises all of the symptoms of V.'s manifestations, but Mehemet dismisses the notion of a disease progressively revealed in history, unless it be seen as a metaphor for age, a metaphor which humanises the process, bringing it "down to a size you can look at and feel comfortable"(p.461). However, Stencil finds the idea of old age more comfortable, the notion that the earth will continue on and die in its own time, that "The Armegeddon had swept past, the professionals who'd survived had received no blessing, no gift of tongues"(p.461). This is the attitude of his colleagues, that the recent War was "a new and rare disease which has now been cured and conquered for ever"(p.461); now "an historical account" rather than "the Nameless Horror"(p.459).

But Stencil continues to see the marks of this disease, old age or entropy, manifest in the world around him and formulated in V.-words. So in the political activity of the century, "the real present", "the once-respectable Golden Mean" is supplanted by a "double vision. Right and Left; the hothouse and the street"(p.468); arenas in which "mob violence, like tourism, is a kind of communion"(p.471), uniting "lonely souls, however heterogeneous" in a common opposition to what is. Within this context, Stencil has become increasingly despairing of the possibility of reaching any understanding of a "Situation"; believing now that only the anatomization of every soul and every individual history involved in it offers any hope of eventual comprehension, that accreting accounts of the "Situation" are inadequate. And so he develops an apocalyptic attitude towards history, particularly in terms of the involvement of the Catholic Church in political crises.

She ~~awaited~~ a Third Kingdom. Violent overthrow is a Christian phenomenon.

The matter of a Paraclete's coming, the comforter, the dove; the tongues of flame, the gift of tongues; Pentecost. Third Person of the Trinity. None of it was implausible to Stencil. The Father had come and gone. In political terms, the Father was the Prince; the single leader, the dynamic figure whose virtù used to be a determinant of history. This had degenerated to the Son, genius of the liberal love-feast which had produced 1848 and lately the overthrow of the Czars. What next? What Apocalypse?

Especially on Malta, a matriarchal island. Would the Paraclete be also a mother? Comforter,

true. But what gift of communication  
could ever come from a woman. ... (p.472).

In these reflections, Stencil summarizes the development of V., from "virgin" working through faith, in a manner similar to that of the Son; to "bride" and incorporating the element of virtù, which Victoria Wren had hoped would be a "determinant of history"; to "Mother" and "Queen". That these latter aspects may be different names for the same thing - a feminine and satanic Paraclete, a spiritus infernus rather than spiritus sanctus, an "Anti-Holy Ghost" rather than Antichrist - is suggested throughout the narrative, but more specifically by the sudden appearances of V. as Veronica Manganesse juxtaposed with Stencil's musings. Her "gift of tongues" is an inanimate vocabulary; her "comfort" reserved for those like D'Annunzio and Mussolini who can further her design.

As he recognises Veronica as Victoria Wren, Stencil begins to see the convergence, in her, of the symptoms of his historical V.-disease: "Absolute upheaval ... that is your way, Victoria." And he recalls the riot in Florence which formed the scene for the birth of V.; the narrative only now reveals the involvement of Victoria in that violence,

... he had dragged her away from an unarmed policeman, whose face she was flaying with pointed fingernails. Hysterical girl, tattered velvet. Riot was her element, as surely as this dark room, almost creeping with amassed objects. The street and the hothouse; in V. were resolved, by some magic, the two extremes. She frightened him (p.487).

So, "hothouse" and "street", violence, "an obsession with bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter"(p.488), decadence, tourism, all come together in this woman. And, as Hugh Godolphin will later, Stencil becomes her victim; relinquishing his now tenuous hold on the "real present", to enter V.'s "hothouse-time"(p.489), permanently.

However, the identification of Veronica, and hence all of the historical V.-personae, as V. does not define the nature of V. Even Stencil, having known her, writes in his journal: "There is more behind and inside V. than any of us had suspected. Not who but what: what is she"(p.53). But an analogy is suggested between V. and Mara, which may be significant. Like Astarte, the figure-head of Mehemet's xebec, Mara is a goddess of love and death, thus related to V. through her association with Venus; Maltese for "woman", also like V., "disguise is one of her attributes"(p.462); "she once had access to the entire island and the waters as far as the fishing banks off Lampedusa"(pp.461-62), but is constrained to haunt Xaghriet Mewwija, on which Valletta is situated. Mehemet recounts her story to Stencil as they approach Malta, and in connexion with his conception of old age as the world's "disease".

"Beware of Mara," the old sailor said then.

"Gaurdian spirit of Xaghriet Mewwija. ...

She's restless. She will find ways to reach out from Valletta ... there are more ways than one to consummation" (p.465).

So the implicit question: is V. an avatar of Mara, her historical manifestations Mara in her many disguises? Certainly, the V.-clues gathered by Herbert Stencil all tend to a center which is Malta; Sidney Stencil perceives a central quality to Valletta, a place enclosed, as if for quarantine: "No time in Valletta. No history, all history at once ..."

(p.484), like the "dead center" of history's "carousel". The most conclusive evidence for a definitive link between V. and Mara is the circumstance of Stencil's death. Belonging now to V., he nonetheless leaves Malta, aboard Mehemet's xebec.

Draw a line from Malta to Lampedusa. Call it a radius. Somewhere in that circle, on the evening of the tenth, a waterspout appeared and lasted for fifteen minutes. Long enough to lift the xebec fifty feet, whirling and creaking, Astarte's throat naked to the cloudless weather, and slam it down again into a piece of the Mediterranean whose subsequent surface phenomena ... showed nothing at all of what came to lie beneath, that quiet June day (p.492).

Like Mara, this latest conquest of V.'s does not proceed past "the invisible circle centered at Xaghriet Mewwija with Lampedusa on the rim"(p.462). Perhaps a victim of "pure accident. Fish? Mermaid? Scylla, Charybdis, wha. Who knew how many female monsters this Med harbored?" (p.432); or perhaps Stencil is prevented from ever revealing the nature of V., such as he knows it.

The narrative approaches the problem no closer. Like Herbert Spencer in his First Principles, Herbert Stencil attempts to define an "Absolute Being" which is ineffable, finally unknowable and which can only be approached through experiential data or the laws of its manifestations. Stencil himself refuses to decide the "tenor" of the metaphoric "vehicle" which is V., the spiritual significator which informs V.'s many temporal signs. Yet the narrative itself explores her several

key concepts, analyzing each and then syncretically relating them to the Lady V. But without a clear interpretative relationship between the narrative and its sacred pretext apparent, without a spiritual context, the interpretation of these signs becomes a hazardous business. Particularly when the narrative focuses upon the forces of Evil, forces which are expressed in their very resistance to coherent cognitive systems. So the nature of V. is ambiguously located in the entropic nature of the signs which manifest her, and the apocalyptic nature of the process which she appears to represent: soulless "communion", decadence, "tourism", "skin" as opposed to "soul", violence and disguise or prosthesis, all are sub-categories of a pervasive tendency towards the non-human and an entropic homogeneity. History itself is the figural medium of the revelation of this pattern, but the progressive confusion of linguistic categories, of the distinction between the spiritual and literal meanings of metaphor, which are the inevitable consequences of entropy, resist the consummation of the figural process: the establishment of a signifying relationship between temporal signs and a spiritual semiotic pattern, which then allows knowledge of the metaphysical force informing history and language.

A pretextual relationship, of a kind, is established between the narrative and the events of Apocalypse, but it is an oblique and highly ambivalent relationship. The paraphrase of part of the Koran, by Gebrail, the Biblical framework of V.'s development and the narrative's frequent references to the possible identity of V. as a satanic Paraclete, conspire to suggest that the entropic process which she symbolizes is, in fact, Apocalypse; that "Armageddon had swept past", that V. as "Queen" reigns over the Great Tribulation which is the society of the Whole Sick Crew. Within this context, no final cataclysm is imminent; instead, the inexorable progress of V.'s design will produce an eventual "heat-death", sounding cataclysmic, but in effect the simple exhaustion of all avail-

able energy in a final decadence. In Gebrail's terms: "The desert (is) prophecy enough of the Last Day"(p.84).

The difficulty of knowing or perceiving this prophecy, however, is a definitive aspect of V. and, in fact, of all Pynchon's figurae. Consequently, Richard Patteson concludes that

Pynchon's fictional territory might be said to lie along the perimeter which divides knowledge from non-knowledge.<sup>16</sup>

This perimeter is ambiguously defined. But the attempt to expand it, to expand the "knowable" and the "signifiable", is the ongoing effort of Pynchon's narratives. As is the exploration of metaphor, and words in general, as the temporal signs of invisible realities. V conducts this exploration in a narrative form which corresponds, in terms of its plot structure, to the generic structure of allegory. Actually, the "fictional territory" which Patteson identifies is the realm of the allegoric investigation into the relationship between knowable, though "fallen" or entropic, temporal signs and ineffable spiritual realities. V is analogous, particularly, to the structure of Melville's The Confidence-Man, where this linguistic, signifying relationship is complicated by the ambiguous and distanced nature of the pretext. One consequence of the dilemma thus created is the increased burden of the reader, who is obliged to complete the interpretative quest begun by the hero. Another result is the increasing ambivalence of metaphor as a signifying mode: "A thrust at truth and a lie". Both are problems - pretextual and metaphoric - which are further explored in The Crying of Lot 49, as Oedipa attempts to establish the typological structure of the Trystero.

CHAPTER THREE

## THE TYPOLOGY OF THE TRISTERO

The initial stages of Oedipa's typological quest coincide with the inception of an intuitive, figural mode of perception. Upon entering San Narciso - which will form the civic nexus of her proliferating clues - the city's topography immediately evokes an analogy with "her first printed circuit":

The ordered swirl of houses and streets,  
from this high angle, sprang at her now  
with the same unexpected, astonishing  
clarity as the circuit card had. ...  
there were to both patterns a hieroglyphic  
sense of concealed meaning, of an intent  
to communicate. (p.13).

It is this impulse to read from the semiotics of her world, to identify repetitions of uncertain significance, that leads Oedipa onward in her quest, towards "all manner of revelations"(p.9). And yet, a visible or merely apparent correlation between realms of being does not necessarily signify the existence of a providential design, of an objectively real center of signification, as Oedipa is soon to learn. In fact, the primary object of her quest is to be some validating authority, a "transcendental signifier" which would legislate the meaning of the signs that she encounters by making precise distinctions between the elements of analogies, the literal and metaphoric references of the word, the significance of repetition: an authoritative text - or pretext - which will explain her world and her relation to it.

For Oedipa seeks something more than a linguistic "center" to the

free play of temporal signs. She seeks her own identity, the "kynde knowynge" which Will and Redcrosse develop concomitant with an understanding of the revealed Word and their places within a transcendental scheme. Peter Abernathy has recognised the characteristically allegoric nature of this search for identity, calling Oedipa's a "Spenserian quest":

a search for the dragon, Tristero, that will give her identity through its conquest, a search which makes use of the machinery of allegory - "flat" characters, suggestive names, a task which becomes more clearly defined as the action progresses, a "moral" tone etc.<sup>1</sup>

Although he obviously conceives of allegory as a form somehow synonymous with the moral fable, still Abernathy hits upon a telling analogy: whilst The Crying of Lot 49 is not a fablistic allegory of the kind constructed through allegoresis, it is a figuralistic narrative in a manner akin to The Faerie Queene and, in fact, to all figural allegories. Like them it, and the heroine, search for a transcendental center which informs history and language, and for a way of knowing it, of making it comprehensible to "fallen" or entropic understandings. So the catalyst which transforms a suburban housewife into an allegoric heroine is a text: Inverarity's will supplants her previous passivity or "will-lessness", requiring that she exert her own will in the attempt to execute his.<sup>2</sup>

Inactivity or passivity - Stencil's malaise before he discovers the V.-enigma - and a deep dissatisfaction with it, are the forces which initially motivate the quest. In Mexico with Inverarity, she had seen a

painting entitled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre" ("Embroiderers of the Terrestrial Blanket") which depicts a number of frail girls, prisoners in a circular tower

... embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void ... and the tapestry was the world. Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried (p.10).

She reads the triptych as a parable of her own condition, her sense of insulation or isolation from the world. Yet the "magic, anonymous and malignant" which "keeps her where she is" (p.11), is of uncertain ontological and epistemological status. It is articulated by the narrative as

what had remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffering, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix (p.10).

Existing at the interface between presence and absence, it locates Oedipa on the perimeter which divides meaning from non-meaning, knowledge from non-knowledge. But her instinct, and the impulse of the narrative is to determine and give meaning to this "formless magic" (p.11); her only alternative is to live in a world refracted through self-pitying tears. And so begins the search for an interpretative structure

which will make this force intelligible, a cognitive form which will bring it into a condition of meaning, present to Oedipa's knowledge.

Like V, the narrative addresses the problem of finding a valid medium for discovering and communicating knowledge; but rather than organize itself around the question of the observational nexus - the point of view - it explores a number of psychological, cognitive modes: solipsism, paranoia and narcissism. The reason for this move away from formal interpretative structures towards perceptual perspectives is not far to seek - unlike V, The Crying of Lot 49 begins with the assumption that a significant correspondence between material phenomena or temporal signs and invisible spiritual realities will be established subjectively; that the perceived analogical pattern and its transcendental signifier have only a potential objective existence. In this way, the capacity of language to generate either true understanding or a corruption of understanding is more directly confronted than it was by the earlier narrative. For although this painted tower, and Oedipa's intuition that she is somehow represented by it, suggest a nascent solipsism on her part, it functions also as her Tower of Babel. It is from this point in the narrative that Oedipa is introduced to linguistic difference: the differentiation of Language into languages. The "characters" which she encounters tend to inhabit discrete fields of discourse; each resides within a private universe of signifiers, each is informed by its own signifier. And these centers of meaning are almost invariably reducible to the self - whether the paranoid, solipsistic or narcissistic self - and are limited by it.

Contemplating the analogical quality of San Narciso, Oedipa suspects that "words were being spoken", but "on some other frequency" (p.13), in an aural space to which her ear is not attuned. Exclusion from "the 'religious instant', whatever it might have been"(p.13), her peripheral perception of it, evokes another analogy. This time it is

the image of her disk jockey husband, Mucho, separated by soundproof glass from his colleague's "movements stylized as the handling of chrisms, censer, chalice might be for a holy man"(p.13), isolated from the "faithful" who tune into the voice, "looking in, knowing that even if he could hear it he couldn't believe in it"(p.13). The image reifies her sense of exclusion from a religious field of discourse; its lines are drawn with Oedipa located on the outside, able to perceive only the echo of meaning. And so she arrives at the motel "Echo Courts", its sign featuring a nymph with a face "much like Oedipa's"(p.14). There is a suggestion, sustained throughout the narrative, that Oedipa, like the nymph, has been doomed to repeat endlessly the same words; in her case, to see the word "Tristero" echoed in signs all around her, but significant only in terms of herself.

Another element is added to her emerging analogical system by the map of Fangoso Lagoons, a housing estate which forms part of Inverarity's business holdings. As it flashes onto the television screen, Oedipa draws a surprised breath,

Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead. ... (p.18).

"Hierophany" is the term coined by Mircea Eliade, in The Sacred and the Profane, to "designate the act of manifestation of the sacred":

From the most elementary hierophany ... to the supreme hierophany ... there is no solution of continuity. In each case we are confronted by the same mysterious act - the

manifestation of something of a wholly different order, a reality that does not belong to our world, in objects that are an integral part of our natural "profane" world. <sup>3</sup>

Oedipa is granted - or perhaps grants herself - only the promise of such a manifestation, not the event itself, which compounds her cognitive dilemma by further precluding the possibility of establishing some objective continuity, which would indicate the nature of the invisible forces with which she is confronted. The difficulty of identifying something which is entirely "other", which exists in an alien space-time continuum, is comically revealed by the game of "Strip Botticelli" that Oedipa plays with Metzger.

The film, whose ending she tries to guess, is atemporal and omni-temporal - like the divine figural pattern - "in an air-conditioned vault at one of the Hollywood studios, light can't fatigue it, it can be repeated endlessly." (p.20). It is not subject to the limitations of temporal time: the sequence of its events, and its conclusion, have been determined in advance, locked in a protective vault they will exist indefinitely. But Oedipa can know them only by watching the sequential unfolding of the film, only as it exists in her space and time and the perspective which these provide. Metzger, the child star of Cashiered, is of course familiar with its plot; singing in harmony to "Baby Igor's Song", he reproaches Oedipa for not joining in, "'I didn't know'" (p.18) is her reply. She cannot join in the song because she doesn't know the words - precisely the dilemma which the Tristero will present to her. She lacks an interpretative structure which will make its signs legible, which will provide access to an anterior source of meaning. As it is, she must "buy" clues to the movie's conclusion.

from Metzger, by removing an article of clothing for each. In the bathroom, where she dons every piece of clothing she has, in preparation for the "Strip Botticelli", she knocks over an aerosol can which suddenly begins to atomize, flying about the closed room with violent and dangerous speed.

The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel; but she wasn't fast enough, and knew only that it might hit them at any moment (p.23).

It is an anterior source of this kind that Oedipa seeks - "God or a digital machine" - which has determined in advance the meaning of her enigmatic clues, the Tristero signs that she perceives in temporal terms whilst suspecting that they are atemporal or omnitemporal in nature.

The narrative designates this "night's infidelity with Metzger" (p.28) as a possible beginning to the end of her encapsulation in her tower. Certainly, her experience of cinematic atemporality and the rogue aerosol prefigure aspects of the quest to come; but the encounter with Metzger also sensitizes her to the concept of conspiracy. Her initial reaction to his handsome appearance, "They, somebody up there, were putting her on. It had to be an actor"(p.16), develops quickly into the suspicion of "a plot, an elaborate, seduction, plot"(p.18). It is the conspiratorial quality of the Tristero which "would come to haunt her most, perhaps; the way it fitted, logically, together"(p.28): to a V.-like ominous logic. What she is particularly sensitized to, however, is language, inscribed signs and words. So she notices the misprint on

an otherwise "ordinary Muchoesque envelope": "REPORT ALL OBSCENE MAIL TO YOUR POTSMASER"(p.30). In what will become almost a habit, she questions the meaning of this unfamiliar word, confessing her inability to read it. More important though, is her questioning of "WASTE" and its enigmatic symbol - soon to be identified as a mark of the Tristero - which she discovers inscribed on a toilet wall. Instinctively, she reads it as something more than innocent graffiti, copying it down with the thought, "God, hieroglyphics"(p.34). Succinctly she describes what the Tristero will become for her: a difficult linguistic, symbolic puzzle - hieroglyphics discovered in obscure, and often unexpected texts.

The problem of recuperating meaning, textual or otherwise, which is subject to historical distortion is underlined by Mike Fallopian's "proselytizing" for the Peter Pinguid Society: "one of these right-wing nut outfits"(p.31), with a tendency toward paranoia. The politics of this group derive from what was possibly the first Russo-American military confrontation; but this is established only as an ambiguous possibility. This event, central to their raison d'être, is narrated by Fallopian in an exaggerated conditional mode. Textual sources, which would otherwise verify the historical accuracy of his particular "retrieval", only add to its ambivalence. Yet he accepts the notion of semantic relativity, the fact that "motion is relative" and the indeterminate nature of written reports. So the "9th March, 1864" is "a day now held sacred by all Peter Pinguid Society members", even though what actually happened on that day "is not too clear"(p.32). Its sanctity is achieved and preserved through belief, a leap of faith which makes the ideological system subjectively true, rather than through any objective form of authentication. As Fallopian explains: "We don't try to make scripture out of it"(p.32). Still, the dialectic between Marxism and industrial capitalism which he sees working through

the exemplary career of Peter Pinguid is assumed to reveal truth; unlike the opposing Birch Society, whom he accuses of thinking in terms of "Good guys and bad guys", Fallopian believes that he is privy to some "underlying truth", the "creeping horror" inherent in the dialectic.

His capacity to believe in a central "truth" despite the uncertain status of its surrounding evidence should stand as a paradigm for Oedipa; as should his synthesising ability which extends into the - soon to be significant - area of postal monopolies.

He found it beyond simple coincidence that in of all years 1861 the federal government should have set out on a vigorous suppression of ... independent mail routes ... He saw it all as a parable of power, its feeding, growth and systematic abuse (p.35).

To this coincidence or correlation Fallopian's essentially paranoid mode of perception introduces a secondary level of discourse, a commentary: a conspiracy. In the face of acknowledged relativism, his interpretation of what are potentially discrete events - the Civil War and the postal reform movement - reveals again the "same creeping horror"(p.33). This, for him, serves as a center of meaning, to end or "close" the free play of historical signification by determining the meaning of signs, and in such a way that a determinate semantic system is formed, a system which manifests his "creeping horror" as a parable of power. In the manner characteristic of paranoid cognitive forms, it is tautological; but such is the consequence of a perceptual mode which locates the individual, subjective, consciousness as the sole locus of meaning. This is Oedipa's dilemma: the possibility that, apart from the

echoes of the word "Tristero", she may be the only linking feature in a series of arbitrary coincidences.

Still it is a dilemma which she does not initially recognise. Fallopian's notion of an active political principle working through history suggests two possible, opposed yet both objective, modes of being for the Tristero: the active or the passive; in her personal terms, the irrelevance which would permit co-existence or a compelling, urgent relevance demanding of her some significant response. So that if the "breakaway gowns, net bras, jeweled garters and G-strings of historical figuration"(p.36) should be stripped away from the Tristero, revealing it "in its terrible nakedness", the narrative speculates,

Would it smile, then, be coy, and would it  
flirt away harmlessly backstage, say good  
night ... and leave her in peace? Or would  
it instead, the dance ended, come back down  
the runway, its luminous stare locked into  
Oedipa's, smile gone malign and pitiless;  
bend to her alone among the desolate rows  
of seats and begin to speak words she never  
wanted to hear? (p.36).

Any solution to this question, the temporal nature of the Tristero, would not however solve the epistemological problem created by its ontological ambiguity - whether it is objectively or subjectively real as either the source of meaning for Oedipa's enigmatic hieroglyphics or a discoverable motive behind coincidental historical events.

As she delves further into the complexities of Inverarity's estate, Oedipa becomes aware of another coincidence, one which will lead to a literalizing of the metaphoric Tristero "performance". At

Fangoso Lagoons, object of her earlier analogical "hierophany", she encounters Manny di Presso, a paranoid with good reason to be paranoid, who is pursued apparently by the Cosa Nostra. The subject of this particular altercation is bones: the bones of American GI's harvested by di Presso's client from Lago di Pietà and later sold to one of Inverarity's subsidiaries, where they were reduced to charcoal for use in a filter program. Listening in to di Presso's brief - his client's case against the Inverarity estate - are the Paranoids, who are quick to relate it to "that ill, ill Jacobean revenge play", The Courier's Tragedy: "The same kind of kinky thing, you know. Bones of lost battalion in lake, fished up, turned into charcoal —"(p.43). It is this link between the play and the estate that Oedipa sets out to clarify but is instead confronted by a repetition of "what had remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away"(p.10), and by a name, a word for it: Trystero.

For amid its bloodspilling, the manifold varieties of torture and death which it explores, the play also investigates the relation of language to truth and evil. Importantly, the decadence which infects the Squamuglian court of evil Duke Angelo is linked, though implicitly, to a debased conception and use of language. Angelo has a remarkably literal attitude towards words, evinced in darkly comic fashion by the nature of the ink he uses. Having ordered the massacre of neighbouring Faggio's Guard, he has the Knights' bodies thrown into a lake; their bones are later retrieved, reduced to charcoal and then transformed into the ink which Angelo uses in all subsequent communication with Faggio. The rather literal irony of this occasions him much mirth, as does his pun on ink:

This pitchy brew in France is "encre" hight;

In this might dire Squamuglia ape the Gaul,

For "anchor" it has ris'n, from deeps untold  
(p.49),

Subsequently, the form of torture chosen for an uncooperative cardinal coincides with Angelo's linguistic predeliction: they perform the Holy Sacrament, but in a very literal manner, using the body and blood of the cardinal. He is

... forced to bleed into a chalice and  
consecrate his own blood, not to God, but  
to Satan. They also cut off his big toe,  
and he is made to hold it up like a Host  
and say, "This is my body", the keen-witted  
Angelo observing that it's the first time  
he's told anything like the truth in  
fifty years of systematic lying (pp.47-48).

Here, Angelo's is a peculiarly medieval form of evil, revealed in the undermining of Truth by destroying the symbolic basis of its temporal manifestations. Traditionally, this sacrament is observed in figural terms, as the outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual grace; and it is this spiritual dimension which Angelo attacks in the rites of torture and ignores in his use of words. His conception of truth is limited to a simple, literal, relationship of resemblance. But the assassins he employs to murder the rightful heir to Faggio, Niccolò, occupy a linguistic space which is external to the dichotomy of literal versus metaphoric meaning. The explicit naming of these assassins is deferred; they are initially identified only by a shift in verbal atmosphere.

It is about this point in the play, in fact,

that things really get peculiar, and a gentle chill, an ambiguity, begins to creep in among the words. Heretofore the naming of names has gone on either literally or as metaphor. But now ... a new mode of expression takes over. It can only be called a kind of ritual reluctance. (pp.49-50).

Like the magic, "anonymous and malignant" which Oedipa became aware of through the medium of the Varos painting, these agents of death are called upon "from outside"(p.11); Angelo summons them from an unknown realm outside the primary scene of the action. They too resist overt articulation; their identity is indicated by "Significant Looks", it is "all a big in-joke"(p.50): those who know, simply know, but do not say. So when they finally appear, the assassins move "in lithe and terrible silence"(p.51). Confronted by them, Niccolò is reduced to silence, "cannot speak, only stutter, in what may be the shortest line ever written in blank verse: 'T-t-t-t-t... '"(p.51). The consequence of their appearance, apart from the death of Niccolò, is the transformation wrought upon the letter, written by Angelo, which Niccolò was carrying. No longer is it a lying assurance to Faggio's government of Angelo's good intentions, but a confession of his many crimes: "A life's base lie, rewritten into truth"(p.52). Trystero bring death, in Niccolò's case, and reveal death as the fate of the Lost Guard - a function which, as we shall see, is shared by those groups affiliated with the Tristero, operating in contemporary California.

But it is here that Oedipa first hears the word "Tristero", uttered "on a note most desperate", amid an atmosphere of pervasive semantic ambiguity. Perhaps it is this ambivalence that prompts her to search out the play's director, Randolph Driblette. Ostensibly, she is

puzzled by the coincidence with the bones, the possibility of a connection between the repetitions, yet she also tells Metzger that she doesn't care about them. Trystero has left her too looking "around for words, feeling helpless"(p.53). Consequently, it is the Trystero that she discusses with Driblette, or rather, the Trystero "look": "The knowing look you get in your dreams from a certain unpleasant figure" (p.55). Upon discovering that these "Significant Looks" - the "ritual reluctance" with which the nature of the assassins is expressed - were created by Driblette, Oedipa questions him, pursuing some anterior meaning which would explicate their ambiguity. But Driblette discourages this search for concealed meaning; all she gets from him is "the same aura of ritual reluctance", and some advice. He argues that significance lies not in language, rather in the subjective consciousness; not in texts but in the head.

That's what I'm here for. To give the spirit  
flesh. The words, who cares? They're rote  
noises to hold line bashes with ... But the  
reality is in this head. Mine. I'm the  
projector at the planetarium, all the closed  
little universe visible in the circle of that  
stage is coming out of my mouth ... (p.56).

Driblette has a non-paranoid conception of meaning, truth and reality - because he is solipsistic - believing that the self is the only knowable element in the process of signification. A paranoid, such as Fallopian, is aware of the relativity of his position, finding "beyond simple coincidence" the evidence of conspiracy, yet remaining aware of the fact of coincidence. His solipsism obscures the subjectivity of his "reality" at the same time as Driblette elevates it to the status of a

hermeneutic principle. From this aspect, the proximity of solipsism to narcissism becomes apparent. The solipsistic notion of the self as the only knowable entity is, in Driblette's case, based upon the narcissistic mode of projecting his own meaning and, from the limited perspective of self-absorption, taking it for the only existent reality. He accuses Oedipa of a Puritan obsession with "words, words", of which she is probably guilty, but this is a part of her developing verbal consciousness which will not permit her any satisfaction with a compromised version of "truth"; what she seeks is Truth. So although Driblette warns her that "You can put together clues, develop a thesis ... You could waste your life that way and never touch truth", she cannot accept his solipsistic mode of perception, his notion that "Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it."(p.56). Solipsism represents a form of understanding generated by a limited - in religious or figural terms, corrupt - vision of the capacity of language, one which restricts its representational abilities to those of the individual mind, which becomes the sole locus of its meaning, supplanting the Word as the source of knowledge.

Yet Oedipa is beginning to recognize the restraints imposed by her language, her time and space, ultimately her own mind, upon her capacity to discover a reality which exists beyond those bounds. Her ability even to emulate Driblette, to become "the dark machine in the centre of the planetarium", and bestow life or meaning upon the Inverarity estate is limited by "her deep ignorance of law, of investment, of real estate, ultimately of the dead man himself"(p.58). However, these doubts are offset by the proliferation of "revelations which now seemed to come crowding in exponentially ... until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero"(p.58). The recurrence of the tapestry image, recalling the painted tower with its imprisoned, solipsistic weavers, almost coincides

with the description of Driblette's eyes - "surrounded by an incredible network of lines, like a laboratory maze"(p.54) - which so capture Oedipa's attention, suggesting that whilst she does not actively "project a world"(p.59), perhaps something has adhered to "her viscera"(p.55), a tissue of Tristero threads which structure her perceptions and progressively weave her clues or signs into a text. But as soon as this possibility is introduced, Oedipa encounters Stanley Koteks, another communicant of WASTE, absent-mindedly doodling the muted posthorn symbol. From Koteks she learns not only of the existence of an alternative postal system, but also how much further she must develop if she is to become a competent reader of her semiotic world. Until now, she has read "WASTE" as if it were a word, but when she pronounces it thus to Koteks, his "face congealed, a mask of distrust"(p.63) - she has pronounced herself an outsider. "'It's W.A.S.T.E., lady,' he told her, 'an acronym, not 'waste'"(p.63). So this single clue - or what she had thought of as a single sign - proliferates, separating itself into five equally enigmatic initials, signs: a paradigm of her quest.<sup>4</sup>

Once again, Oedipa finds herself alienated from a symbolic field of discourse. The substance of this symbol, WASTE, is partially clarified for her by Fallopian. Or rather, her suspicion that it is the emblem of an alternative, objectively real, medium of postal communication is "embellished". He confirms her nascent conception of an "underground" peopled by the dissatisfied, alienated, dispossessed: "an underground of the unbalanced, perhaps"(p.63). To this central idea or pattern all of her clues seem to start up; her "revelations" take on the appearance of figural signs pointing to something "to do with the mail and how it is delivered"(p.64). A significant connection, a continuity, between this pattern and the Tristero is, therefore, the element which she next pursues, prompted by a return to Fangoso Lagoons. There she finds an historical marker, representing the site of the

massacre of Wells, Fargo men by "a band of masked marauders in mysterious black uniforms"(p.64). The similarity between this physical description and the costumes worn by Driblette's Trystero assassins becomes more important when she puzzles over the meaning of a cross, apparently inscribed in the dust by one of the victims: "A cross? Or the initial T? The same stuttered by Niccolò in The Courier's Tragedy" (p.64). She pursues the meaning of this inscribed sign by searching out a text of the play; but turning to "the single mention of the word Trystero"(p.65), discovers the existence of a variant line. From this she takes encouragement, thinking that "Another reading of that line might help light further the dark face of the word"(p.65). When she finally traces a copy of the original hardcover edition, however, she is confronted with a completely different line, mentioning no Trystero, and an editorial note indicating that the play exists in Folio and Quarto editions, as well as a "Whitechapel" edition which "besides being a fragment, abounds in such corrupt and probably spurious lines ... is hardly to be trusted"(p.75). The performance which Oedipa has witnessed though, must draw upon another, unacknowledged, edition. Again, her clues proliferate, but now from a "Text" into texts.

This tendency towards proliferation, which seems to be somehow inherent in her clues, stands contrary to the conventional progress of a figural hermeneutic, which leads from the process of analysis to a syncretic synthesising or unification of signs into a transcendental One. But a cause for this propensity to multiplicity in the narrative is revealed through the unlikely figure of Mr Thoth, a character who is dismissed almost at the same time as he is introduced to the action. And yet this brief appearance provides an important indication of the nature of the pretextual antecedents to The Crying of Lot 49. I mentioned earlier the function of the allegoric narrative as an interpretation of a prior, sacred text and also the necessity that modern

allegories address themselves to the problem posed by the historical devaluation of pretextual authority. Pynchon's narratives adapt themselves to this situation of semantic scepticism by drawing upon sacred texts which are located outside the mainstream Christian tradition: although the events of Revelation contribute importantly to their spiritual contexts. In V we saw the Koran adding its authority to the apocalyptic atmosphere of Stencil's quest; in The Crying of Lot 49 it is the Egyptian religious canon which reinforces the narrative's apocalyptic and Pentecostal allusions. For whilst the context created through biblical reference provides an indication of the potentially sacred nature of Oedipa's clues - her "hieroglyphics" - it is the Egyptian god Thoth and the metaphysic which he represents that determine the capacity of the narrative's language, and of Oedipa's quest, to articulate a supranatural reality. As I have already noted, the pretext serves the dual function of representing a culturally accepted visualization of the implied sacred order and of determining the status of allegoric language, its capacity to signify such an order.

In contrast to the Christian God, identified with Truth, Thoth is a messenger-god, a divine intermediary, who does not create but rather executes through language - signifies - the creativity of another god, Horus. So Thoth is not a source of Meaning, does not contain it within himself, but is a purveyor of it. However, he is a deceptive agent of Truth, knowledge and linguistic reality; an agent of duplicity and multiplicity rather than of unity. Attributed to him is the introduction of plurality into spoken, and perhaps also written, language. Jaroslav Černý in a short article, "Thoth as Creator of Languages", cites a papyrus which invokes Thoth in the terms: "Hail to thee, Moon-Thoth, who made different the tongue of one country to another".<sup>5</sup> So in the Egyptian tradition, Thoth forms a counterpart to the Christian concept of Babel: the fall of language from an exclusively spoken state

of linguistic grace into a written mode, with its consequent obscuring of a transcendent source of meaning anterior to the signs which convey it. And it is against this spiritual/semantic background that Oedipa pursues her quest. She is confronted with the cognitive obstacles posed by foreign languages - not in the sense of languages differentiated on racial grounds - but modes of discourse which differ from one mind to the next. This, inevitably, poses the problem of continuity; a continuity among languages which may provide access to a Language or metalanguage transcending temporal categories of difference; and also a continuity among figurae, between repetitions or "hierophanies", which would reveal the force informing each. But it is Thoth, whose function it is to "work at the subversive dislocation of identity"<sup>6</sup>, who points to non-identity as a constitutive quality of the invisible reality which she pursues - perhaps a reason why she perceives only the promise of an ultimate hierophany. Just as the typological characters Abraham or the Samaritan in Piers Plowman or Beatrice in "Rappaccini's Daughter" indicate, albeit partially, the nature of an informing spiritual order of reality so Mr Thoth provides an important clue to the nature of the sacred impulse which determines the narrative's figural signs, particularly their accessibility to knowledge - with the crucial exception that here, as in V, it is the demonic aspect of the sacred which is encountered.

Like the Lady V. who, as we have seen, is potentially a satanic Paraclete, who works at the erosion of distinct linguistic categories, Mr Thoth presents an explicit co-mingling of discourses. It is in her conversation with him that Oedipa confronts the intersection of Thoth's dislocative project with language.<sup>7</sup> She seeks from him some clear indication to the identity of the "masked marauders" - whom she suspects were Tristero assassins - that systematically and violently opposed the Pony Express, for whom Mr Thoth's grandfather rode, and Wells, Fargo. But the old man's memory is adulterated by dream landscapes and the

idiom of Porky Pig cartoons. All he remembers of the desperadoes is their similarity to a cartoon anarchist, "The anarchist ... dressed all in black"(p.66), but even this is confused by memories of the stories that his grandfather would tell, so that they become "The Indians who weren't Indians"(p.67): identity meets non-identity. Their name he tries to recall in terms of foreign languages, groping among them for something which would trigger his memory: "'A Spanish name,' Mr Thoth said, frowning, 'A Mexican name. Oh, I can't remember'"(p.67). Finally he has recourse to the signet ring, cut from the finger of one killed; and engraved upon it "was once again the WASTE symbol"(p.67).

Perhaps significantly, Oedipa's response to this revelation is cast in terms of a traditional image signifying salvation: light shining through glass; an image which recurs, with this meaning, in the opening sequence of Gravity's Rainbow.

She looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the centre of some intricate crystal, and said "My God".

"And I feel him, certain days, days of a certain temperature," said Mr Thoth, "and barometric pressure. Did you know that? I feel him close to me."

"Your grandfather?"

"No, my God." (p.67).

Mr Thoth repeats the analogy, made in "Entropy", between the soul "(spiritus, ruach, pneuma)" as air and the atmosphere, "warpings" in which are capable of recapitulation "in those who breathe it"(p.278).

The symbol applied to Oedipa's conception, however, represents the intrusion of an external force into a closed system, paradigmatic of the Tristero's intrusion into her world. But as a sign of salvation, it is an ambiguous symbol, complicated by her proximity to Thoth.

The narrative's only previous reference to salvation is Oedipa's "unvoiced idea" of the Pacific ocean "as redemption for Southern California", an entity which "stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth"(p.37). She represents the sea, to herself, as among other things "the hole left by the moon's tearing-free"(p.37). Thus, it is the presence which indicates an absence, containing or straddling the two, and so reifies the position in which she is located by her Tristero-quest, poised between presence - her clues - and an absence - the "transcendental signifier" of them. Now Thoth, besides being the god of writing or cryptography, is also the god of the moon: identified either directly with it or as its protector.<sup>8</sup> Any sacred radiance which he may possess is reflected light, originating in Ammon-Ra: "the god-king, the sun-god".<sup>9</sup> In this, as in his signifying function, Thoth is a secondary god - occupying a space on the interface between presence and absence: light and its source, language and its meaning; and so he forms a sacred analogue to Oedipa. But whereas Oedipa is largely a passive receiver of signs, clues to a transcendent reality, Thoth actively disrupts access to the original sacred One, the source of meaning, the light which would illuminate "the dark face of the word", the center which Oedipa must know if she is to verify the objective reality of the Tristero.

For Thoth would himself become the god of the creative word; he would displace and subvert - through violence if necessary - his father, the "Word".

It is not in any reality foreign to the "play

of words" that Thoth also frequently participates in plots, perfidious intrigues, conspiracies to usurp the throne. He helps the sons do away with the father, the brothers to do away with the brother that has become king.<sup>10</sup>

It is in terms of such a conspiracy that Oedipa finally discovers a relationship between the "WASTE symbol" and the Tristero. From Genhis Cohen, the philatelist who is to inventory and appraise Inverarity's stamp collection, she learns of Thurn and Taxis, the private mail couriers who were "from about 1300 ... the European mail service"(p.70): their emblem or "symbol", the posthorn. And among Inverarity's stamps are discovered forgeries, in which a mute is inscribed and inserted into the bell, forming the WASTE symbol. Oedipa is not surprised by this though,

She nodded. The black costumes, the silence, the secrecy. Whoever they were their aim was to mute the Thurn and Taxis post horn (p.70).

What does disturb her, however, is the nature of other alterations wrought on the ostensible Thurn and Taxis stamps: "laboriously worked into the design, like a taunt"(p.71). The picture of a Pony Express rider, for instance, galloping towards "a single, painstakingly engraved, black feather"(p.71) - denoting, perhaps, the presence of an "Indian who isn't an Indian" - and the transposition, "U.S. Pottage". After she has described her extraordinary "Muchoesque envelope", the possibility occurs to them that this systematic defacing or forgery may

be as old as Thurn and Taxis, originating in 1290: "An 800-year tradition of postal fraud"(p.71). It is not until much later in the narrative that Oedipa learns the identity of its "founding figure": Hernando Joaquin de Tristero y Calavera, dispossessed of Thurn and Taxis and so dedicated to "obstruction, terror and depredation along the Thurn and Taxis mail routes"(p.120). Her initial reaction to the possibility of a real, historic, Tristero system is to suggest informing the government. In doing so, she "loses" Cohen who abruptly shifts the conversation to the wine they are drinking.

This dandelion wine, made by Cohen, is the result of a process of transubstantiation similar to that which Oedipa has already encountered, while pursuing the coincidental repetition of the bones-made-charcoal. Bones, other than those of fallen American GI's, used in Inverarity's filter program, were obtained from the cemetery which made way for "the path of the East San Narciso Freeway"(p.41); bones upon which these dandelions were nurtured. This unexpected repetition Oedipa thinks of as a "signal",

She could, at this stage of things, recognize signals like that, as the epileptic is said to - an odor, color, pure piercing grace note announcing his seizure. Afterward it is only this signal, really dross, this secular announcement, and never what is revealed during the attack, that he remembers. Oedipa wondered whether, at the end of this ... she too might not be left with only compiled memories of clues, announcements, intimations, but never the central truth itself, which must somehow each time be too bright for her memory

to hold, ... she would never know how many times such a seizure may already have visited, or how to grasp it should it visit again (p.69).

Later, she will think of these "signals" as potential "compensation ... for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word"(p.87).

In these terms, their nature is akin to that of the Derridean "supplement": "that which both signifies the lack of a 'presence', or state of plenitude for ever beyond recall, and compensates for that lack by setting in motion its own economy of difference".<sup>11</sup> So what "might be possible to get lost in"(p.69) is the plenitude of figural signs, secular announcements, which seem to promise a revelation of truth, if only partially, but signify instead the absence of Meaning. Her clues are, in the characteristic manner of figurae, available to secular explanation, her repetitions can be merely discrete coincidences but allegoric figurae open also to religious interpretation - repetitions become aspects or temporal manifestations of an eternal pattern which, like the film Cashiered, is or can be manifest in any discontinuous sequence, but from the perspective of the atemporal exists all-at-once. A significant semiotic continuity is apparent only through the medium of a secondary discourse, a commentary. And the figural signs, which can be read literally to refer to a secular object of reference, from a hermeneutic perspective reveal - metaphorically - an implicit spiritual reference, as their signifying function is discovered in terms of a transcendental origin. But without such a hermeneutic, Oedipa could well become lost in a linguistic maze, in the infinite play of secular, historical and semantic signification. As we have seen, the conventional allegoric hero/ine discovers an interpretative mode which is largely dictated by the pretext and the signifying capacity

which its language represents. Oedipa's dilemma is compounded by the nature of this narrative's pretext which appears to endorse the enigmatic, indeterminate quality of her temporal signs. For Thoth is the god of "secret accounts; of hidden texts: an archetype of Hermes; the god of cryptography no less than of every other -graphy."<sup>12</sup> In this, he is aligned with the Tristero, an organization which intentionally eludes articulation and any specificity of description.

Yet despite this, the narrative continues in the attempt to discover an interpretative system which would bestow coherence and a meaningful order upon its figural signs, to make them cohere rather than simply accumulate. And so Oedipa continues to pursue a clear set of distinctions between the elements of analogies or repetitions and, particularly, between the literal and metaphoric references of the word. She is not, of course, the only character embarked upon such a search for a source of meaning and value: already she has met Fallopian who perceives as truth a "creeping horror" manifest in the dialectic of history, and has heard Driblette's panegyric to himself as the center of linguistic meaning. But the subjectivity of their interpretative stances means that her quest must go on. Still, it is not until her encounter with John Nefastis, eccentric inventor, that she realizes the fundamental arbitrariness which underlies their accommodations with semantic relativity.

For Nefastis creates a significant relationship between two distinct realms - thermodynamics and communication - through the ambiguous linguistic device of metaphor: "a thrust at truth and a lie, depending on where you were"(p.95). Conventionally, the "truth" of a figural metaphor is validated by its sacred perceptual context - an awareness of its place in a divine providential scheme. Without this "ultimate" authentication its import remains ambiguous; a "thrust at truth" or a merely apparent conceptual similarity. Oedipa has been

"sensitized" to the idea of an invisible reality which is manifest in the temporal by her experience of Cohen's "sacramental" wine, the idea that the dandelions' "home cemetery did in some way still exist ... As if the dead really do persist, even in a bottle of wine." (p.72). So when Nefastis presents her with a reification of this concept she feels "like some kind of heretic" (p.77) in objecting to it. He takes as his "invisible reality" entropy, which is measured using similar equations in both thermodynamic and communication theory. He explains: "The two fields were entirely unconnected, except at one point: Maxwell's Demon" (p.77). And it is such a Demon that he assumes to exist within his "Nefastis Machine". As I pointed out in the second chapter, the flaw in Maxwell's theory, his notion of the Demon as an agent which could actively counter the increase in entropy, is the fact that the sorting done by the Demon constitutes work. Oedipa realizes this when she asks Stanley Koteks

"Sorting isn't work? ... Tell them down at the post office, you'll find yourself in a mailbag headed for Fairbanks, Alaska, without even a FRAGILE sticker going for you. (p.62).

Nefastis corrects this practical flaw in the theory by introducing the "sensitive", the one who must receive the Demon's "staggering set of energies, and feed back something like the same quantity of information" (p.77), thus instilling a different form of energy into the otherwise closed system of the Machine; all at some "deep psychic level". The result of this process, the visible sign which signifies the Demon's existence, and the reality of the invisible phenomenon entropy, on the "secular level" is "one piston, hopefully moving" (p.77). Consequently, for Nefastis, the Demon authenticates the truth of the metaphor, entropy,

which

... connects the world of thermodynamics to the world of information flow. The Machine uses both. The Demon makes the metaphor not only graceful but objectively true. (p.77).

But whilst Nefastis requires a secular sign as evidence of entropy's reality, he simply assumes the reality of the Demon. It is this unquestioned assumption that Oedipa queries, suggesting that "the Demon exists only because ... of the metaphor"(p.78). His reply is to smile, "impenetrable, calm, a believer"(p.78).

So Oedipa turns to the photo of Clerk Maxwell, emblazoned on the Machine, as a possible anterior source of the Demon's significance. But he has nothing to show her, the "familiar Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge photo"(p.62) reveals nothing beyond her own desire to perceive a sign, to know the reality of an intangible force and her own capacity, as a "sensitive", to see it. In the absence of visible evidence, Oedipa can only conclude that the Demon is one of "the man's hallucinations"(p.79). The "Nefastis Machine" provides access, not to an external truth, but to a formulated system of belief, the comfort and security of which Oedipa envies. However, she can no more share Nefastis' private world of discourse, his possible madness, than she could accept Driblette's solipsistic mode of cognition. Still she seeks some avenue to an objective realm of meaning, where significance is not constrained by the limitations of the individual psyche and its meaning-making facility. Nefastis takes a metaphor and literalizes it, assuming that this then represents a Truth, a one-dimensional relationship of resemblance, in much the same way as Angelo, in The Courier's

Tragedy, mistrusts the figural and spiritual dimension of the sacraments, seeing instead a perverse literalizing of the Eucharist as something "like the truth". This confusion of the two referential functions of the word, its relation to the intangible concepts it signifies, is the major obstacle which Oedipa faces. Metaphor is the medium in which she must work, to find an adequate relationship between secular signs and an origin of meaning, and hence a coherent hermeneutic system which binds the temporal to the eternal.

Through the example of Nefastis she begins to realize this; she recognizes in him, more so than any of the characters previously encountered, a paradigm of her own quest: "He had made his mere coincidence respectable with the help of Maxwell's Demon", yet

... here was Oedipa, faced with a metaphor of  
 God knew how many parts; more than two,  
 anyway. With coincidences blossoming these  
 days wherever she looked, she had nothing but  
 a sound, a word, Trystero, to hold them together  
 (p.80).

Nefastis takes a word, entropy, and makes of it a metaphor, but at the cost of literalizing it, restricting its meaning to that of a label, naming a coincidence. Oedipa's metaphor, however, is problematic precisely because of its unrestricted signification: Trystero is the word, the "vehicle" which links many "tenors", but has yet to reveal its "Tenor". The suggestion that what she is, in fact, faced with is simply "a metaphor of God"<sup>13</sup> ignores the satanic nature of these localized meanings - tenors - of "Trystero" which are relatively unequivocal. Driblette counts among the things "Wharfinger didn't lie about" the "other", "The Adversary"(p.56); in researching his history of private mail delivery Fallopian is familiar with the Pony Express and Wells,

Fargo, but not with what he terms "their dark adversaries"(p.67); in the annotated text of The Courier's Tragedy Oedipa discovers an alternative to her "Trystero line": "This tryst or odious awry, O Niccolò" (p.74), and a note suggesting that it contains the pun: "This trystero dies irae"(p.75) - Trystero as the Day of Judgement, of wrath, or as a deus irae, a wrathful god. But it is in her descent into the San Franciscan night, the "plunge toward dawn indefinite black hours long (which) would indeed be necessary before The Tristero could be revealed" (p.36), that she experiences the full range of the Tristero's aspects, its field of meaning or relevance in temporal terms.

Here, she discovers what it is adversary (or Adversary) to; not simply the Thurn and Taxis postal monopoly, but monopolies in general: the Establishment, the legitimate society. Here, where the city reveals itself in a new form, stripped of its varnish, of "customary words and images"(p.86), she ceases to be a "tourist" and perceives what really lies on its skin, that which "customary words" cannot name or articulate and so obscure instead: "the separate, silent, unsuspected world"(p.92). Yet she begins her descent as a tourist, with the name Arnold Snarb, among the tourists herded into a bar "The Greek Way". Already she is aware of WASTE as "a channel of communication for those of unorthodox sexual persuasion"(p.80); so it is not surprising that here she should soon discover another "Trystero post horn. Mute and everything"(p.81); now as the emblem of Inamorati Anonymous, a society of isolates dedicated to the battle against love, "the worst addiction of all"(p.82). So it is only after Oedipa has admitted her own isolation that the anonymous inamorato recounts the history of "Founder, IA": a story which parallels her own.

Like Oedipa, isolated in her "tower", this executive "had been from age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death"(p.83). Abruptly "the faceless pointsmen"

shunt him on to "another pattern of track"(p.76), and off the rails. Deprived of the possibility of a presidency - automated out of his job - he is left with no alternative but death; whereas Oedipa, evicted from her "tower", is left facing "the void". However, he is saved from "taking his Brody" by his own indecision initially, then by his recognition of "Absurdity", and finally by a bundle of letters, from an underground of failed suicides, delivered by WASTE. Doused with gasoline in preparation for his fiery death, he finds that the ink has dissolved from the stamps to reveal the WASTE symbol: "'A sign,' he whispered, 'is what it is'"(p.85). WASTE, and his determination to found Inamorati Anonymous, provide an alternative source of value, external to the limited eschatology to which he has been educated. Exiled from the mainstream culture by innovations in communication technology - rather than love - the muted posthorn appears to him as a mystical vision, a sign from the world of the disinherited; consequently it is to non-communication that he dedicates his life and through the disruption of personal communication endows it with meaning.

Oedipa, with her sustained reluctance to make such a leap of faith, her scepticism towards its efficacy - in ultimate terms - remains poised between signs and their potential meaning. But as her descent continues, the perimeter between the two, between reality and fantasy, becomes blurred: "she would have trouble sorting the night into real and dreamed"(p.86). Yet this is a phenomenon which has dogged her perception from the beginning. Approaching San Narciso, driving through a monotonous, unchanging landscape, her movement becomes "an illusion of speed";

What the road really was, she fancied, was  
 this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere  
 ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein

nourishing the mainliner L. A., keeping it  
 happy, coherent, protected from pain, or  
 whatever passes, with a city, for pain (p.14).

Such a tendency to transform reality into image, the particular into the abstract, underlies her entire quest - and the narrative's reporting of it - which would be a means of fulfilling it, if she could establish a coherent set of signifying relationships between these realms of being. The real and the particular as clues crystallize into an apparent logic, but the meaning of this temporal system in terms of a "higher" source, as something other than a complex tautology, can be determined only through reference to a valid, and valorized, interpretation of the sacred and its modes of temporal manifestation: a pretext. In its absence, Oedipa is caught amid the various significations of the word and in the ambiguity of reality versus fantasy. That this confusion of categories attaches also to herself is evinced by such lapses in her perception. Yet it is also a quality which appears to reside in the nature of her world: in the city drugged by a fantasy - an American Dream - which obscures the painful traces of reality; in a culture so predicated upon the denial of death that it necessarily includes its opposite, in "Forest Lawn and the American cult of the dead"(p.42) as Manny di Presso tells her or, as she discovers for herself, in the instinctual "death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture" (p.87). And it is the Tristero which reveals these hidden springs, by embodying an Opposite Principle, by exaggerating that which the Establishment inevitably lapses in to.

Travelling in a "busful of Negroes going on to graveyard shifts" (p.89) Oedipa finds the post horn "with the legend DEATH": "DON'T EVER ANTAGONIZE THE HORN"(p.90); at the airport she finds a gambler averaging a .625 percent loss which he will never overcome; she reads "an

advertisement by AGDC, standing for the Alameda County Death Cult" who, every month, choose a victim from the Establishment, "the socially integrated and well-adjusted"(p.90), use him sexually and then sacrifice him; she overhears a boy departing for Florida where he will surreptitiously open communications with the dolphins and report to his mother via WASTE, to maintain secrecy from the government; and she finds a Negro woman who is dedicated to the "rituals of miscarriage" rather than of birth, seeking not continuity but "interregnum"(p.91). The substance of these encounters is reified in the figure of a night-watchman "who had trained his virtuoso stomach" to accept the material counterparts of "all the promise, productivity, betrayal, ulcers, before it was too late ... in a hopeless attempt to assimilate it all" (p.91). Oedipa, the Young Republican, begins thus to perceive the full nature of her Republic, the world which coexists with that of Muzak, Tupperware parties and "shrinks" but previously has been hidden, relegated to "another pattern of track"(p.76). It is a sub-universe, created by "a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic"(p.92) and its emblem, "decorating each alienation", is the muted posthorn. Denied the reality of an American Dream these, the disinherited, realize instead that which the dream was designed to obscure; and in so doing, reveal or define through opposition the majority culture.

Here, the narrative's sustained references to Narcissus clarify, as a diagnosis not of Oedipa's interpretative method but of the condition of the world she tries to interpret. So San Narciso, the base for Inverarity's business holdings, the point from which they have expanded, becomes symptomatic of a culture narcissistically in love with its own appearances, its "customary words and images", high on its self-perpetuating Dream.<sup>14</sup> Epitomizing this peculiar form of addiction is Inverarity himself in "his need to possess, to alter the land, to bring new sky lines, personal antagonisms, growth rates into being. 'Keep it all

bouncing'"; but it is a need predicated on the knowledge that "the bouncing would stop"(p.134). This nexus between narcissism and death is prefigured in The Courier's Tragedy, where the good Duke of Faggio dies after kissing the poisoned feet of an image of Saint Narcissus, ushering in

a landscape of evil ... fashioned for ... 17th-century audiences, so preapocalyptic, death-wishful, sensually fatigued, unprepared, a little poignantly, for that abyss of civil war that had been waiting, cold and deep, only a few years ahead of them (p.44).

Oedipa's America may not be heading toward another Civil War, but still it is a divided culture, preapocalyptic and death-wishful, its divisions based not so much on politics as on the private subjectivity of each citizen. Oedipa has encountered the Babel-like quality of the nation's language, its proliferation into esoteric universes of discourse, but this linguistic phenomenon is repeated or echoed in social, moral and ethical terms as well. So Mucho, working as a used-car salesman, is confronted with a daily parade of "people poorer than him (bringing in) motorized, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like"(p.4). Each car is a narcissistic extension or projection of its owner which, like his speech, embodies a discrete system of value. But amid this apparent multiplicity lies homogeneity; the car is exchanged for another, "just as futureless"(p.5), isolated system.

In fact, wherever Oedipa looks she encounters closed systems, each affiliated with the Tristero, which begins to take on the appearance of a label, a name for this phenomenon of increasing isolation: entropy.

Certainly it coincides with an entropic increase in probability; as her quest proceeds a limited number of symbols - WASTE, the muted posthorn and Tristero itself - recur with accelerating frequency. And the semantic ambiguity with which it is characteristically associated marks an entropic dissolution of linguistic categories. The figural system of relationships between the sign, its object of reference and a potential "transcendental signifier" - which presuppose a metaphoric structure of perception - become obscure as entropy dissolves the distinctions between literal and metaphoric or spiritual significance. Only a "ritual reluctance" is left as the residue of a once efficacious mode of expression. This failure or inability of language to differentiate paradoxically reinforces - if it did not actually create - the tendency towards isolated systems visible in all areas of her culture. As a consequence, the metaphor becomes a literal expression of a private system of belief, given order and meaning by the individual consciousness, which in turn exaggerates the narcissism inherent in the culture. Given the possibility that Oedipa is attempting to read from a culture/text in entropic decay, her pursuit of an adequate linguistic, hermeneutic set of distinctions becomes crucial, as does the question of the Tristero's ontological status.

For if it is an avenue to a "direct, epileptic Word", the sacred, it would represent the intrusion of that new and different form of energy required to counter the progress of entropy. Here, Oedipa's image of salvation as light shining through glass becomes important as does the concept, articulated by Jesús Arrabal, of a miracle as "intrusions into this world from another, the kiss of cosmic pool balls"(p.92). The implied relation between the Tristero and Thoth suggests that if the Tristero is some form of transcendental force intruding into the closed world of contemporary America, then it is only analogous to the sun shining through glass and in actuality is a weak, reflected light which

cannot be traced to a numinous centre or origin: the glass barrier can never be pierced. More likely is the possibility that the Tristero and its posthorns emanate from a distinct secular world, a secular "miracle" originating in the "separate, silent, unsuspected world". Yet the Tristero embodies the symptoms of entropy in its temporal manifestations, and as a potentially sacred force would be demonic rather than divine; working from within the closed, preapocalyptic, cultural system, like the Lady V., to embody and direct the process of decay. It does reveal the "reality principle" against which America anaesthetizes itself, the death-as-entropy underlying its appearances which it denies and so affirms. In the manner of the Christian Satan, and V., the Tristero's message is the certainty of death, a message which Oedipa gradually learns to read in the medium of her culture, but perceives most fully in her encounter with an old and derelict sailor.

Here, the quest culminates in her central linguistic revelation, in a moment of caritas, of sympathy which ~~trans~~verses the constraints of self and time that were, through her discovery of an atomized culture, "immobilizing her"(p.92). Having met with so many discrete, idiosyncratic worlds of discourse and perception, Oedipa wonders "what concentric planets" this sailor might have uncovered, what coded experiences his mattress might contain "like the memory bank to a computer of the lost" (p.93), before it too is lost. With these speculations,

She remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored, coded years of uselessness, early death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it ... would truly cease to be, forever,

when the mattress burned. She stared at it  
in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered  
the irreversible process (p.95).

This is Oedipa's "miracle", in the sense that "each death, up until the moment of our own, is miraculous"(p.5). Like George, in Giles Goat-Boy, she realizes the "entropy to time", the facts of loss and death, to which the Tristero has been pointing all along. And so she discovers also the mystery of life, its interdependence with death, encapsulated in the image of "dt", the time differential "where death dwelled in the cell though the cell be looked in on at its most quick"(p.96). It is also a recognition of the ephemerality of revelation, of any access to truth; a lesson which all allegoric hero/ines learn - that though they may discover a mode in which Truth becomes knowable and accessible and real as a means to salvation, it is an awareness difficult to sustain and impossible to share. Although Oedipa believes that the sailor "had seen worlds no other man had seen if only because there was that high magic to low puns"(p.96) - because the pun can draw together realms of being into a quasi-figural pattern - still "nothing she knew of would preserve them or him"(p.96). The moment of realization, the identification of a relationship or continuity, even of Truth, recedes into the past and loses the significance of its immediacy. From there, so many "fatigued brain cells (would intrude) between herself and truth"(p.68).

Now, Oedipa is able to articulate the attitude toward metaphor which has been evinced throughout the narrative:

The saint whose water can light lamps, the  
clairvoyant whose lapse in recall is the breath  
of God, the true paranoid for whom all is  
organized in spheres joyful or threatening about

the central pulse of himself, the dreamer  
 whose puns probe ancient fetid shafts and  
 tunnels of truth all act in the same special  
 relevance to the word, or whatever the word  
 is there, buffering to protect us from. The  
 act of metaphor was then a thrust at truth  
 and a lie, depending on where you were:  
 inside, safe, or outside, lost. Oedipa did  
 not know where she was. (p.95).

Metaphor can create a quasi-figural perceptual or linguistic system through which truth becomes accessible, but it is a highly provisional structure which does not bring transcendental Truth itself present to knowledge; rather, it unites temporal signs or figurae into a significant - though subjective and temporary - continuity. The passage quoted above makes this distinction between the word and what it would "protect us from" - the anterior logos which calls the word into being yet cannot itself be spoken or written with any adequacy of representation - a distinction which could be cast in terms of the opposition between Thoth and Ammon-Ra: the opposition between that which is duplicitously temporal and its atemporal origin. Beyond such a perceived continuity or "special relevance to the word" lies a region of semantic uncertainty which can be determined only by reference to some anterior, valorized sacred text. So although Oedipa's clues appear to conform to an "ominous logic", in the absence of a hermeneutic context, a reliable interpretation of them, their validity and import remain ultimately ambiguous.

Oedipa's psychoanalyst, Dr Hilarius, interprets this sort of ambiguity into particularly threatening paranoid "spheres". Guilt for his Nazi past he attempts to assuage by cultivating belief in the literal truth of Freud's writings, "even the idiocies and contradictions"

(p.100). It is not these contradictions, however, which lead inevitably to the failure of his attempt, but the confusion of literal and metaphoric meaning inherent in his hermeneutic approach.

Freud's vision of the world had no Buchenwalds in it. Buchenwald, according to Freud, once the light was let in, would become a soccer field, fat children would learn flower-arranging and solfeggio in the strangling rooms.

... I tried to believe it all. (p.102).

Hilarius appears to succeed, in part, at "the forcible acquisition of faith"(p.102); at least he succeeds in so far as he can create a metaphoric system which becomes meaningful in terms of "the central pulse of himself"(p.95). His problem is that the subjective reality of his "Freud" seems to him to be inadequate as penance. Consequently, the residue of his unpurged guilt creates, what are in his terms, objectively real Israeli gunmen, pursuing him at every turn: "They walk through walls. They replicate: you flee them, turn a corner, and there they are, coming for you again"(p.100). These phantom Jews approximate a figural mode of existence, transcending the constraints of temporal time and space. Like the saint, they can overcome natural laws - walking through walls - and like the clairvoyant's insight, "whose lapse in recall is the breath of God", they are atemporal and omnitemporal, materializing in all moments and seemingly existing outside time. But the figural mode of perception which Oedipa seeks is perverted by Hilarius; he actively and neurotically projects these Israeli figurae which are born of a fundamental semantic confusion. His inability to reconcile the literal and metaphoric meanings of the word, which would otherwise reveal a figural One - perhaps the archetypal avenging Jew - leads instead to

psychosis. Still he advocates his compromised, subjective, hermeneutic, advising Oedipa to cleave to her esoteric Tristero system:

Hold it tightly by its little tentacles,  
 don't let the Freudians coax it away or  
 the pharmacists poison it out of you.  
 Whatever it is, hold it dear, for when you  
 lose it you go over by that much to the  
 others (p.103).

Hilarius recommends a "relative paranoia" as the mainstay of identity - the psychological counterpart to those discrete systems of discourse which Oedipa has already encountered. There is of course a minimal possibility that Hilarius - like Manny di Presso - does have something to be paranoid about; but in the absence of real Israelis "coming in the windows" he is just crazy. Oedipa, however, requires a more elusive, less visually verifiable, form of authentication for her Tristero clues. She has witnessed a Tristero mail delivery, tracking a Tristero postman across Los Angeles - so the temporal structure is tangible enough - yet still the meaning of the overall structure eludes her.

She has been sensitized to the idea that invisible, but apparently real, worlds co-exist with the present; Cohen's pseudo-sacramental wine initially instills the concept, Jesús Arrabal's political philosophizing embellishes it, and her experience of a deaf-mute delegation seems to demonstrate it. As she is whirled around the dance floor, amid a throng of deaf-mute couples, Oedipa braces herself for the inevitable collisions. None of the dancers can hear the "real" music, each couple dances to an individual tune and in a different step: "whatever was in the fellow's head"(p.97). But there are no collisions; the only explanation for this unexpected phenomenon is

some unthinkable order of music, ...  
 a choreography in which each couple  
 meshed easy, predestined. Something they  
 all heard with an extra sense atrophied  
 in herself (p.97).

The narrative appears to be alluding to some equivalent of the traditional "music of the spheres", a divine harmony which is the archetype of imperfect, temporal music - the kind of quasi-Platonic Idea that Oedipa is seeking, which is continually promised to her but always is denied. The deaf-mutes seem to have access to a central "pulse", the informing center of the structure in which they are involved. Oedipa can see that this situation conforms to Arrabal's definition of "an anarchist miracle", but she has no idiom with which to describe it and "with no name for it, was only demoralized"(p.97). Here, she witnesses a number of discrete, idiosyncratic mind-structures meshing together in a mutual recognition of a higher order of reality - separate and yet unified. It is such a meaningful unity which she persists in pursuing amid the independent Tristero systems found in her culture.

Her husband, Mucho, discovers a form of unity or community through music - though with the help of LSD - which he transforms into "joyful" paranoid spheres about the "central pulse of himself". Unlike Hilarius, or Oedipa, Mucho is not confronted by the problem of reconciling different forms of verbal meaning ( literal versus metaphoric ); he reduces language to its lowest denominator - sound. He reduces "chords, and timbres, and words too" (p.105), to "the basic frequencies and harmonics" (p.106); so that among this aural and verbal difference he finds a shared quality or sameness, an entropic homogeneity which he interprets as community, "the brotherhood of man". It is this sort of unity, or rather cohering, which is produced through all of the para-

noid, solipsistic and narcissistic modes of perception explored by the narrative. And like them it is motivated by a nightmare awareness of "nada", nothingness, of the void. The absence of a transcendental signifier, a Word which is the origin and center of temporal meaning, motivates the proliferation of individual meaning-systems which so confuse and demoralize Oedipa. This metaphysical dimension of Mucho's LSD-induced "spectrum analysis" is expressed by a typographical pun:

... you'd have this big, God, maybe a  
couple hundred million chorus saying  
"rich, chocolaty goodness" together,  
and it would all be the same voice (p.106),

and "you", or at least Mucho, could also have "this big God". But although Mucho discovers a perceptual system which permits him to live peacefully, it is gained at the expense of his identity. As the "central pulse" of the system, Mucho is overwhelmed by the concept of unity - he is the community that he perceives - progressively becoming more "generic", "a walking assembly of man"(p.109). In this, he is directly opposed to Oedipa and the direction of her quest. As I remarked at the opening of this chapter, Oedipa leaves her "tower" to embark on a search for identity, for a transcendental signifier which will describe the nature of her world and denote her place within it. Such a subjective accommodation with the "void" as Mucho's, Fallopian's or Driblette's is insufficient for her, her quest is directed towards the revelation of an objective logos. But thus far, this quest has consisted of a constant vacillation between the promise and deferral of revelation, and a demoralizing progression of failures to establish such an objective reality.

Such failure is the direct result of the lack of significant

distinctions inherent in these hermeneutic systems. The semantic limitations imposed by the self, as the center of paranoid, narcissistic and solipsistic meanings, determine the signifying capacity of the word and invariably refer it back to the self, forming what is essentially a complex tautology. Oedipa, however, is searching for a logos which would define her self, rather than be defined by it, by articulating a system of distinctions which would render the semiotics of her world readable. But she is caught in the allegoric paradox of attempting to discover through words that which lies beyond them yet is the origin of them and is manifest in these signs. Continually she is brought back to the realization that the temporal constraints of language and the self constitute the medium in which she must work, along with the growing awareness that they are subject to the distorting influences of time, entropy and death. Only a figural hermeneutic, which bridges these disruptions by revealing a timeless, divine, continuity, can provide an exit from the linguistic maze of her Tristero puzzle.

Without the interpretative distinctions - between types of verbal meaning and their relations - upon which figuralism is based, Oedipa attempts to avoid the ambiguities of language through a direct, non-verbal, access to meaning. So she searches out Emory Bortz, editor of The Courier's Tragedy, in the hope of discovering the source of Wharfinger's Trystero.

"I would like to find out," she presently  
plunged, "something about the historical  
Wharfinger. Not so much the verbal one."  
(p.113).

But the reply that she receives confronts her once more with the fact of semantic temporality, the fact that Wharfinger is dead and that any knowledge of the Trystero which he may have possessed has passed with

him, succumbed to "the irreversible process" of death. So she is again reminded that all she has are words; and the Trystero words of her paperback edition are, according to Bortz, "pirated ... Bowdlerized ... Misprints. Gah. Corrupt."(p.113). Obviously, not only death can disrupt the process of meaning, but it is the most insurmountable obstacle of Oedipa's quest for an anterior source of meaning. Bortz tells her as much when he nominates Driblette as the man most capable of evoking "the microcosm of that play as it must have surrounded Wharfinger's living mind"(p.114); but Driblette too is dead. Bortz, and his graduate students, assume that Driblette's non-reliance on language provides an avenue to non-verbal meaning; but the meaning which Driblette formulates thus is located in an indeterminate region, difficult to authenticate or evaluate. Still, the news of his death and the discovery that the performance which she witnessed was the only one to include mention of the Tristero prompt a shift in Oedipa's search for an anterior meaning of or information about the Tristero. That is, her question "where does The Courier's Tragedy get off with its 'Tristero' line?"(p.75) is supplanted by her questioning of "why Driblette had put in those two extra lines that night?"(p.121). So she accompanies Bortz and his students to a night-time wake at Driblette's graveside. As she sits, hoping to communicate with whatever remained of Driblette, "whatever coded tenacity of protein might improbably have held on six feet below" (p.121), Oedipa repeats her experience with Maxwell's Demon. Again she tries to make contact with an invisible, impalpable, reality, to receive some sign of its reality.

Now, it would be a sign in the form of information, a telepathic message explaining whether his "walk into the sea had anything to do with Tristero"(p.121). But as ever, the difficulty of determining motives, of distinguishing between the real and the imagined, defeats her.

Had he even known why? No one could begin to trace it. A hundred hangups, permuted, combined - sex, money, illness, despair with the history of his time and place, who knew. Changing the script had no clearer motive than his suicide. There was the same whimsy to both (p.121).

Oedipa too, relying on the duplicitous evidence of her senses to determine the success or failure of her attempt, cannot distinguish the objectively real from projected fantasy: "she felt briefly penetrated, as if the bright winged thing had actually made it to the sanctuary of her heart"(p.121), but as with Maxwell's Demon this may be "only a retinal twitch, a misfired nerve cell"(p.78). Intuition or telepathy is an inadequate access to knowledge without a satisfactory evaluative basis of clear distinctions among ontological and epistemological modes: her linguistic problem applies equally to all other areas of her quest and her entropic culture/text.

Consequently, she returns to her written texts and particularly to Bortz's "Wharfingeriana", source texts to The Courier's Tragedy. Here she learns of a pornographic version of the play which one scholarly opinion attributes to a radical Puritan sect, the Scurvhamites. As a "Scurvhamite project" the play would have been rewritten, the words changed, in order to "damn it eternally"(p.116). Analogous to this project is the operation of the Tristero, which as we have seen displaces words from the conventional signifying relationships of metaphor and literalism into unfamiliar modes such as "ritual reluctance" which are difficult to make legible. In opposition to this, Bortz's summary of the Scurvhamite metaphysic introduces to the narrative a relatively explicit account of the characteristically allegoric interpretative

world view, with the exception that allegory treats "Creation" as a vast, intricate text, rather than "machine", in which God is its transcendental signifier and hence its "prime mover".

Their central hangup had to do with predestination. There were two kinds. Nothing for a Scurvhamite ever happened by accident, Creation was a vast, intricate machine. But one part of it, the Scurvhamite part, ran off the will of God, its prime mover. The rest ran off some opposite Principle, something blind, soulless; a brute automatism that led to eternal death. (p.116).

Although this Scurvhamite "Other" is obviously akin to the Lady V., an alternative name for it would surely be entropy: a non-human principle or soulless law which represents an inexorable and universal tendency towards death and is also available to this sort of theological interpretation, as an equivalent of Satan and his death-dealing temporal influence. This aspect is emblemized, in the woodcuts accompanying the pornographic version of The Courier's Tragedy, by the figure of Death hovering in the background of many of the scenes. As Bortz remarks, this is a peculiarly medieval conception of Evil, of the Other - as is Angelo's in the play itself - the concept of evil as the force which matches and undermines Truth in all of its manifestations. And, as is the tendency of the narrative, the Scurvhamites "felt Trystero would symbolize the Other quite well"(p.117).

Oedipa has unravelled, to a "demoralizing" extent, the linguistic or semiotic associations and affiliations of the Tristero with death, in her own culture, and has seen how it embodies and so reveals the

unacknowledged death-wish which lies at its center. As a sociological "other", the defining opposite of the legitimate culture, the Establishment, the Tristero's meaning is quite apparent. But as a transcendental, demonic "Other" its force is manifest in less direct ways. Oedipa requires that Bortz explicate her Tristero lines within this context before she can understand its relevance: "The 'hallowed skein of stars' is God's will. But even that can't ward, or guard, somebody who has an appointment with Trysterero"(p.117). Yet she still feels the inescapable necessity of asking, explicitly, "What was Trysterero?", even though she does so with "the light, vertiginous sense of fluttering out over an abyss"(p.117). Her quest confronts her with "the void", although she does not formulate it in these terms until later; her quest for a semiotic continuity, an anterior, sacred One, leads instead to an absence, of ambiguous origin. But even this is ambiguous: the source text which Bortz lends to her is written with unfamiliar signs; "words ending in e's, s's that looked like f's, capitalized nouns, y's where i's should've been. 'I can't read this,' Oedipa said"(p.117). - perhaps this is true also of her Tristero-text . Still, the clues which she has garnered take the form of symptoms, symptoms of entropy, which in turn are similar to the disruptive effects wrought by Evil upon an otherwise unified, figural system. In other words, entropy, like Falsehood, disrupts communication by eroding distinct linguistic categories, confusing the signifying function of language, isolating people and so giving rise to a proliferation of esoteric discourses, dissipating the energy of the cultural system in a process which leads to "eternal death".

Oedipa discovers this project of disrupting communication to be the defining characteristic of the historical Tristero, as she pieces together fragments of information gleaned from obscure texts. Like a jigsaw puzzle she constructs or is able "to fit together this account

of how the organization began"(p.119). And she finds a motive for the "campaign of obstruction" in the "constant theme, disinheritance" (p.120). The Tristero thus forms the banner of the Preterite, the non-Elect, those passed over by the social Establishment and perhaps also by God. Whether the Tristero is in fact a transcendental force or simply a secular phenomenon is not Oedipa's dilemma alone; Bortz is able to speculate an historical precedent.

If Tristero is able to maintain even partial secrecy, if Thurn and Taxis have no clear idea who their adversary is, or how far its influence extends, then many of them must come to believe in something very like the Scurvhamite's blind, automatic anti-God (p.124).

However, according to Bortz's scenario, as the conditions which supported such a paranoid mode of perception, of interpretation, recede then "the secular Tristero" becomes visible, "a historical principle" is reduced to the "now human enemy"(p.124). And so it may be with Oedipa's Tristero: there exist either the secular processes of entropy or a demonic force informing them, either she has been interpreting her clues paranoically or her essentially figural quest has uncovered a sacred, though satanic, design operating in the temporal signs of her culture. She has yet to find an interpretative mode which would determine the ontological nature of the Tristero; an epistemological failure which may be the result of a demonic ontology.

Another possibility, one which is brought home to her with increasing force, is that the Tristero may in some way originate in Pierce Inverarity, despite the history which she has been able to construct. For this very textual quest - which impels Oedipa from one text

to another, from one mode of discourse to the next - was initially motivated by a text: Inverarity's will. Throughout, the narrative plays upon the various significances of the word "testament". The previous publication of an excerpt in Esquire is acknowledged by The Crying of Lot 49 and by name - "The World (This One), The Flesh (Mrs Oedipa Maas), and the Testament of Pierce Inverarity" - whilst the portion published in Cavalier remains unnamed. Thus, it would seem, the specifically religious connotations of the word are invoked. This title names the allegoric impulse of Oedipa's quest, her attempt to discover an inherent figural relationship between the semiotics of her world, her self and a pretextual, sacred logos. "The World" and "The Flesh" are relatively unambiguous as discrete entities, and until the question of the Word is introduced to them. Particularly this is the case in view of the problematic status of Inverarity's testament: whether it be simply secular, demonic or divine. Caught amid these alternatives, Oedipa tends to speculate in Pentecostal terms. That, just as the descent of the Holy Ghost revealed Christ's will and bestowed the gift of speech, of communication, upon the whole of creation, if she could bring Inverarity's will into a state of "pulsing stelliferous Meaning"(p.58), then the "intent to communicate" which she has perceived in temporal signs would be realized.

Certainly it is such a direct mode of communication, a direct access to knowledge, that Oedipa is in need of. Pentecostal revelation, the direct understanding of the Word through an act of linguistic grace, the inscription of meaning by divine illumination, is not subject to the distorting effects of time and entropy. Yet Oedipa's quest is constrained by temporal intermediaries, and a question which she must confront is the problem of whether a sacred "Other" is manifest in Inverarity and his estate, the source to which all of her clues lead.

Meaning what? That Bortz, along with Metzger, Cohen, Driblette, Koteks, the tattooed sailor in San Francisco, the W.A.S.T.E. carriers she'd seen - that all of them were Pierce Inverarity's men? Bought? Or loyal, for free, for fun, to some grandiose practical joke he'd cooked up all for her embarrassment, or terrorizing, or moral improvement? ... so labyrinthine that it must have meaning beyond just a practical joke (pp.127-28).

Again, Oedipa is not satisfied with the immediate or obvious meaning and again the source of some hidden meaning is inaccessible, dead; so although she has here a continuity among the coincidences of her quest, she is left to speculate about its potential meaning.

A conventional allegoric narrative would, through allusions made to its sacred pretext, relate such a temporal continuity to an informing transcendental signifier, the anterior unifying One. But The Crying of Lot 49 works in an opposite direction: its pretextual antecedent, the Egyptian god Theth, points to a disruptive metaphysical force informing Oedipa's world and her quest. This is apparent particularly in terms of the narrative's Pentecostal reference. It is The Courier's Tragedy which makes the narrative's only explicit allusion to Pentecost. There Ercole, the self-styled "zany Paraclete", rips the lying tongue of Domenico from his head, impales it on his rapier, "sets the tongue aflame and waving it around like a madman concludes the act by screaming,

Thy pitiless unmanning is most meet,  
 Thinks Ercole the zany Paraclete.  
 Descended this malign, Unholy Ghost,  
 Let us begin thy frightful Pentecost (p.47).

This "Paraclete", rather than bestowing the gift of communication, disrupts it in a most unambiguous fashion. And it is such a disruptive project which has been attributed to the Tristero - emblemized by its muted posthorn symbol - as it was to the Lady V., that "Unholy Ghost" or spiritus infernus. So the concept of Pentecost, as it appears in the narrative, whilst pointing to the figural basis of the quest and the potential status of Oedipa's clues as figurae, intersects with the pretext to prophesy the failure of the figural quest or, at least, its indeterminate nature; its failure to reveal the sort of figural relationship which Oedipa seeks. For with the proximity of Thoth to the narrative's texts, including Inverarity's will, the process of meaning is irreversibly disrupted and Oedipa is left, as she has been throughout, poised between meaning and non-meaning, presence and absence, knowledge and non-knowledge.

She interprets this indeterminacy into four alternatives: either a real plot has been mounted against her, or she is fantasizing one; either a real Tristero does exist as "a real alternative to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life"(p.128), or she has paranoically constructed it. These alternatives pivot around the central, unanswered question; the ontological status of the Tristero, whether or not it is objectively real. It is a problem which overwhelms her now, although it has been a part of her quest all along. After her "demoralizing" lesson in the atomized nature of her Republic - in her night descent - Oedipa hopes that she is suffering a curable mental illness.

For this, oh God, was the void. There was nobody who could help her. Nobody in the world. They were all on something, mad, possible enemies, dead (p.128).

In the development of her quest the isolating effects wrought by the Tristero, or named by it, have gradually attached to her. The language of the Tristero and her attempts to understand it have isolated her from her accustomed human contacts; it has become her esoteric discourse. And so she discovers the failure of love as a means of communication in this entropically decaying world; love which was Dante's recourse when all other modes of discourse failed him. For sympathetic love or caritas is the emotional correlative to a figural mode of interpretation, establishing as it does a meaningful contact on both the physical and spiritual planes, simultaneously, just as figuralism relates the apparent or literal meaning to an invisible or spiritual significance in the sign. Oedipa experiences this in her encounter with the dying sailor; there she realizes the capacity of love to overcome the barriers of time and the self but this realization cannot prevent her alienation from Metzger, Driblette, Fallopian or Mucho, as each assumes the appearance of a closed system.

Neither can the rapid accumulation of Tristero clues fill this "void"; instead, it leads her to desperation: physical illness, real or imagined, and attempted suicide. Not surprisingly then, she turns to the anonymous innamorati: "'It's over,' she said, 'They've saturated me. From here on I'll only close them out.'" (p.133). But like Dante, and George in Giles Goat-Boy, it is this admission of ignorance, her acknowledged inability to read her figural signs, that prepares the way for a final revelation. For Oedipa this means the "loss of bearings", of "barriers between herself and the rest of the land", so that San Narciso surrenders its "residue of uniqueness",

became a name again, was assumed back into  
the American continuity of crust and mantle.  
Pierce Inverarity was really dead (p.133).

The figural or spiritual dimension of Oedipa's quest is not realized in the narrative - that is left to the reader - her's is primarily a secular revelation. But its potential to include a sacred analogue is implicit in her interpretations of his will, in the possibility that Inverarity had discovered the Tristero and encrypted it in his will, or that, as "the dark Angel", he had devised a plot, to survive death as a paranoia. Either way Inverarity, like Satan, reveals the existential fact of death. The reality which Oedipa finds coded into his testament is an America which acknowledges death, the America which is home to the disinherited, the alienated, the betrayed, all those denied the illusion of an American Dream, those "in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in"(p.135). This is the "invisible" reality which Oedipa discovers to be the "signified" of her clues, and the "true continuity" among them. Beyond this, "She just didn't know"(p.134).

The only verifiable source of the testament's meaning would be Inverarity himself, but his reliability is undermined by Oedipa's recollection of their final conversation. Modulating from Transylvanian and comic-Negro to Panchuco and "his Lamont Cranston voice"(p.3), the phone call ends in silence and "quiet ambiguity". All that is left, echoing in Oedipa's memory, is his promise of a visit from "the Shadow": perhaps the "Unholy Ghost" or maybe the elusive hidden meaning which Oedipa is led to seek. Inverarity, with this sequence of different accents, prefigures the Babel-like proliferation of discourses which is to dog Oedipa's quest. Certainly he appears to have been aware of what such a quest would involve and discover, and as she realizes this Oedipa gains "a new compassion for the cul-de-sac he'd tried to find a way out of, for the enigma his efforts had created"(p.134). This new compassion, taking the place of her earlier self-pitying tears, represents the knowledge which she has gained, the broadening of her perceptual peri-

meters to embrace a fuller awareness of her self and her world. Like Oedipus, Oedipa learns how implicated she is or has been, living a blinkered suburban existence, in the decay of her culture.

It is her awareness of entropy, the gradual decay of "diversity" into probability, that facilitates some understanding of those who gather beneath the Tristero's banner. And it is entropy, manifest in linguistic terms, which prevents the reconciliation of meanings into a coherent hermeneutic system, leaving Oedipa with a series of binary possibilities: "like walking among matrices of a great digital computer."

Behind the hieroglyphic streets there would be a transcendent meaning, or only earth. In the songs Miles, Dean, Serge and Leonard sang there was either some fraction of the truth's numinous beauty (as Mucho now believed) or only a power spectrum. ... Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none. Either Oedipa in the orbiting ecstasy of a true paranoia, or a real Tristero (pp.136-37).

The conventional allegoric hero/ine begins with speculations such as these and completes the quest with a recognition of the implied, informing One. Oedipa, however, begins with the intuition that a sacred logos "intends" to communicate through temporal figurae and learns to accept this set of possibilities, the indeterminate balance between presence and absence. For within the context of an entropic culture/text the metaphoric basis of figuralism is impaired, it becomes the ceaseless searching for "that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies ... whose brute repetition must some-day call into being the trigger for the unnameable act, the recognition,

the Word"(p.136). In this context, metaphor ceases to be a lie and becomes a "thrust at truth" only with a tacit agreement on the nature of its unspoken "tenor". And this is a "miracle", the "secular miracle of communication"(p.135); but as the narrative suggests, its theological counterpart is the figural miracle of the Word.

As Oedipa has discovered, spontaneity is of the essence of this "miracle"; once "routinized" - to borrow a term from Gravity's Rainbow - and formulated into an interpretative system, this significance is subject to entropy and the confusion it creates among linguistic categories and meanings. It is, in any case, ephemeral; once articulated all truths become time-bound and recede into an irretrievable past. But despite this Oedipa, like any allegoric hero/ine cannot accept the idea of a purely literal reality, devoid of any "invisible" meaning.

For either there was some Tristero beyond the legacy of America, or there was just America and if there was just America then it seemed the only way she could continue, and manage to be at all relevant to it, was as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia (p.137).

Significantly, Oedipa chooses paranoia as a potential mode of perception rather than solipsism or narcissism; she would remain "unfurrowed", not constrained or imprisoned by her own means of perception and interpretation. As I mentioned earlier, paranoia is a mode which, whilst predicated on the assumption of an unseen motive in historical and verbal signs, retains the awareness of relativity, of the fact of coincidence. Paranoia is the neurosis most akin to a figural hermeneutic, sharing its assumption of an anterior source of meaning or, as Foucault

puts it, the "sovereignty of an original Text".<sup>15</sup> Actually, Foucault describes paranoia in terms similar to those of the figural interpretation of a fallen world - a world in which a meaningful system of resemblance is divorced from its signs - and the paranoid as one who is therefore "alienated in analogy":

Beneath the established signs, and in spite of them, he hears another, deeper, discourse which recalls the time when words glittered in the universal resemblance of things ... the Sovereignty of the Same, so difficult to express, eclipses, the distinction existing between signs. <sup>16</sup>

Such a notion of "the Same" poses grave problems to Oedipa's quest: the necessity, and extreme difficulty, of distinguishing coincidence from true repetition, the repetition which is stasis from that which is the progressive manifestation of a divine eternal pattern, temporal conspiracy from sacred hierophany; ultimately it is the necessity of distinguishing between the appearance of similitude and a real, meaningful continuity.

But to make a valid distinction Oedipa requires the knowledge of the informing logos, either through the direct "epileptic Word" or through a sacred pretext, and both are denied her. She possesses the will - psychologically and literally - necessary to figural perception but lacks the means to develop her understanding. Consequently, the figural dimension of her quest remains unfulfilled, she is unable to relate her figureae to a transcendental scheme. Thoth, whose typological role never becomes apparent to Oedipa, provides a metaphysical endorsement for this indeterminacy, through the characteristics which he shares

with the Tristero. Like the Tristero he presides over the organization of death, is involved in conspiracies and works at the dislocation of identity. Thoth motivates the proliferation of Language into languages which are similar to the isolated, esoteric discourses marked by the muted posthorn and, most importantly, he is the god of cryptography, of the hidden meanings which appear to constitute the Tristero's semantic territory. In fact, Thoth, the Tristero, Oedipa's quest and the narrative all intersect as a "Kabbalistic paradigm of the hidden word ... the forty-nine levels of meaning in and beneath the written letter"<sup>17</sup> - and in the failure of such a hidden meaning to be articulated; although the narrative ends in typically indeterminate fashion with Oedipa still waiting on "the crying of lot 49"(p.138).

The penultimate quality of the narrative's (in)conclusion obliges the reader to fill in the hermeneutic gap, to determine the nature of the implied sacred order, perhaps by recourse to a personal pretext. But the absence of a valid, and valorized, interpretation of divine reality poses epistemological and ontological problems all throughout Oedipa's typological quest, by undermining the legibility of her textual world. Figuralism attempts to formulate a significant commentary on the semiotics of the world by relying on the mediation of an authentic anterior interpretation. The "sovereignty of an original Text" is the basic assumption of such a commentary, fulfilled in the perception of a unity or Oneness between temporal signs and an eternal Text. The search for a valid text which does explain the true nature of the world also consumes the characters of Gravity's Rainbow. And not surprisingly, paranoia is the cognitive mode most frequently employed in this allegoric quest for a transcendental signifier, for a power to legislate between the numinous and the noumenon, the sacred and the profane, and to determine the identity of the force manipulating history: the Word or "The Firm"?

CHAPTER FOUR

THE NUMINOUS, THE NOUMENON AND THE TEXT  
 IN GRAVITY'S RAINBOW.

The attempt to isolate the sacred from the profane constitutes the motivating force that underlies the generic structure of allegory. In terms of Oedipa's quest, this force is continually frustrated by a sustained deferral of the promised revelation, a deferral that arises necessarily from an alienated relationship between the narrative in which she exists and its pretext. This alienation effectively disrupts any cognitive access she may have to a transcendental signifier - a sacred, legislative, power - and as a result the plot structure of The Crying of Lot 49 is "foreshortened", as was that of V. Perhaps in response to this foreshortening, but certainly concurrent with the alienation of pretext from narrative, there occurs a modification in the character of the allegoric hero/ine.<sup>1</sup>

To return briefly to an earlier discussion: in the introductory chapter, allegory was defined largely in terms of the nature of the hero and of his quest. There I argued that the role of the hero is primarily that of a surrogate-reader, derived from the task assigned to him by the narrative which requires an exploration of various interpretative systems, before figuralism is recognized as the method by which the capacity of language to signify extra-literal "truths" can be determined. An integral part of this hermeneutic development is the reconstruction of understanding - the acquisition of allegoric literacy. Because initially the hero is controlled by postlapsarian cognitive and linguistic conditions, he must construct a discourse which, ideally, transforms the signs of his "fallen" world-text into the transparent purveyors of sacred meaning, so that an obscurantist texture becomes a luminous Text. And as his proficiency in reading the signs of Truth - logos - increases, the extent to which he has been subject to a "false"

system of control becomes apparent. "Conventional" allegory places the hero finally in a position from which he is made aware of his self, language and history as aspects of a signifying system that is ultimately controlled by the Word; a system that is however vulnerable to false construction. No such finality, no epiphany, is provided for by postmodernist allegory; instead, Oedipa and Stencil discover the extent to which a false logos controls and corrupts access to a numinous "center". They are, consequently, confronted with a choice: to continue indefinitely in a frustrated quest or make a leap of faith that may well land them in "the Void".

But Gravity's Rainbow suggests that, potentially, the system controlled by a false logos - spiritus infernus or Unholy Ghost - may itself be vulnerable to an alternative, redeeming, construction, that "Somewhere, among the wastes of the World, is the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom"(p.525). Still there remains, of course, the central dilemma of distinguishing "waste" from the Word, of differentiating between forms of control. This is complicated in Gravity's Rainbow by an apparent similarity between the phenomenal manifestations of "the Firm" and the traditional figural manifestations of the Word, both of which are unified, centralized, systems of signs. However, where the logos controls a semiotic system that presumes to point the way to spiritual salvation, the Firm is concerned with a more secular form of salvation - "A Nickel Saved" (p.664) - its control of the world directed toward keeping "its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit"(p.412). Like the society of Lady Meed, outlined in chapter one, the world of the "System" is a radically "fallen" world, dominated by self-interest, its apostasy taking the form of rationalization or "Original Sin - the latest name for that is Modern Analysis - but it happens that Subsequent Sin is harder to atone for"(p.722). The sin subsequent to rationalization is

insulation; it is the corruption of language, science, psychology, film, mathematics, as epistemological forms, so that rather than increase understanding they narrow the range of consciousness, insulating it against signs of the sacred, the pantheistic continuity upon which the entire narrative is predicated.

Epistemology appears as a means of control in all allegory which is, as I have repeated, concerned with the "analysis of words as ambiguous tools of thought, capable not only of revealing a true cognition but also of generating a corruption of understanding."<sup>2</sup> It is in terms of a pervasive corruption, where all the means of understanding are controlled by a false logos, that the heroes of Gravity's Rainbow attempt to find the "key" to or basis for a true cognition. Posed are

... two questions. First, what is the real nature of synthesis? And then: what is the real nature of control? (p.167).

But, as in all of the "fallen" allegoric worlds we have so far examined, an immediate effect of the "Fall" is the breakdown of cognitive categories so that "in the Zone categories have been blurred badly. The status of the name you miss, love and search for has grown ambiguous and remote"(p.303). By disrupting the process of signification, the Firm obscures a coherent figural system and subsequently the allegoric quest. "In the Zone, in these days, there is endless simulation ... your real targets are hard to come by"(p.489). The signs of the numinous are rendered illegible, a basis for distinguishing them from "waste" seemingly inaccessible, and supplanting them is a hermeneutic system controlled by what I have termed the "noumenon". The term - but not the concept - is borrowed from Kant. In the Critique of Pure Reason, a noumenon is defined in opposition to a phenomenon as an intelligible

rather than sensible entity, "a thing which is not to be thought as object of the senses but as a thing in itself, solely through a pure understanding."<sup>3</sup> Accordingly, "Proverbs for Paranoids,1" advises that "You may never get to touch the Master, but you can tickle his creatures"(p.237). For the primary heroes of Gravity's Rainbow - Slothrop, Enzian and Tchitcherine - the revelation of "the Master", "the Firm", the "noumenon", as the center of a global conspiracy or cosmic cabal takes the place of the traditional allegoric revelation of the Word, written in the form of an epiphany, a pure access to knowledge or understanding. Not the culmination of a developing figural consciousness however, this postmodernist epiphany is a paranoid awareness,

the leading edge, of the discovery that everything  
is connected, everything in the Creation, a  
 secondary illumination - not yet blindingly One,  
 but at least connected, and perhaps a route In for  
 those like Tchitcherine who are held at the edge. ...  
 (p.703).

Stencil, Oedipa, Slothrop and Enzian are, like Tchitcherine, held at the edge of a promised revelation, poised on the interface between presence and absence.

It may well be that the discovery of a false logos - expressed in a false form of synthesis and control - is all that a postmodernist allegoric hero/ine is capable of, given the epistemological conditions that determine the context in which they exist. Specifically, the shift in the direction of the quest, away from Truth as a realisable goal, displaces also the "inner word" as a motivating factor. The post-modernist hero still seeks a transcendental signifier that "centers" both an external world-text and its interiority context ( the "self")

but his capacity to realise it is severely attenuated. Paranoia, the dominant perceptual mode of Gravity's Rainbow, works to define identity as a function of some external control and so precludes from the quest considerations of fulfilment which is generated internally. "Self" is constructed as the subject of a sinister conspiracy; that is, as the context within which this plot is written. An aspect of the hegemony of the noumenon, the personality is annexed and incorporated into a new, pseudo-figural system as the theomorph, the "inner word", is supplanted by a cryptomorph. The allegoric self is a space within which the ego is written by "Them" - be They the forces of Truth or, as now, of corruption. So the shell-shocked victims of Their "War" "out of each catharsis rise (as) new children, painless, egoless for one pulse of the Between ... tablet erased, new writing about to begin"(p.50). They await the inscription of the noumenon. But the "inner word" forms one unit in a complex semiotic system that is unified by resemblances, or significant analogies, which can be validated by a sacred pretext. The noumenon isolates, through the paranoid construction of self. Such a construction we have seen in The Crying of Lot 49 where several characters employ paranoia tautologically, to posit the self as the center of a meaning-system which refers directly to that self. It is in the absence of some external source that validates the conjunction of self and meaning, some alternative mechanism signifying the same meaning-system, that the tautology exists. In Gravity's Rainbow the presence of several questing heroes contributes to a sense of this validity by creating the implication that the Firm - "Them" - exists not as the projection of a subjective neurosis but as an objective reality.

Well. What happens when paranoid meets paranoid?

A crossing of solipsisms. Clearly. The two patterns create a third (...) (p.395).

This, however, obfuscates the quest for a redeeming construction of the "System". For if "They" exist objectively, then the questing self is a product of Their corrupt and corrupting hermeneutic. The ambiguous status of Tyrone Slothrop as a potential "saviour" exemplifies this ambivalence. Even Slothrop's spiritual "guardian", Roland Feldspath, is unprepared for his election.

Roland shivers. Is this the one? This? to be figurehead for the latest passage? Oh dear. God have mercy: what storms, what monsters of the Aether could this Slothrop ever charm away for anyone? (p.238).

However, Slothrop does possess an inherited propensity to seek hidden orders; he has been made vulnerable to presences like these "monsters of the Aether" by both his personal and cultural history. The legacy of his Puritan ancestry is an inherited paranoia, which finds expression in his tendency to transform the world into text and to read from it. "London the secular city instructs him: turn any corner and he can find himself inside a parable"(p.25). What he reads in the city subject to bombardment by German V-2 rockets is a parable of death. Under the pressure exerted by the Blitz his latent paranoia blossoms along with "a peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky"(p.26), so that his paranoid perception centers on an obsession with "the idea of a rocket with his name written on it"(p.25). Perhaps a pun on the Puritan concept of "predestination", nonetheless his sensitivity to secular explosions is cast in the terms of divine revelation. Like the Northern Lights, the rockets "scared the shit out of him":

- in the sky right now here is the same unfolding,

just about to break through, his face deepening  
 with its light, everything about to rush away  
 and he to lose himself, just as his countryside  
 has ever proclaimed ... slender church steeples  
 poised up and down all these autumn hillsides,  
 white rockets about to fire, only seconds of  
 countdown away, rose windows taking Sunday light,  
 elevating and washing the faces above the pulpits  
 defining grace, swearing this is how it does  
happen - yes the bright hand reaching out of the  
cloud. ... (p.29).<sup>4</sup>

Oedipa was "spooked" by such promises of hierophany - the act of  
 manifestation of the sacred - Slothrop's response is "a sneaky hardon  
 stirring, ready to jump"(p.26).

Also like Oedipa, Slothrop is one who is "alienated in analogy".  
 He is sensitive to hidden meaning in words such as "predestination" -  
 the linguistic aspect of his quest is in fact motivated by "blackwords":  
 the Schwarzknabe seeking the Schwarzgerat - and he is responsive to a  
 latent similitude between signs. For if church steeples are like  
 rockets, then perhaps rockets possess an obscure religious significance,  
 perhaps they too point towards salvation. The direction of Slothrop's  
 quest is towards discovering the hidden tenor of these potentially  
 metaphoric vehicles, towards reading the latent discourse of "the Same"  
 which would draw them into a continuity of hierophany.

However, the Puritan inheritance which suits Slothrop to the  
 quest also constitutes a broader cultural history that the narrative  
 gradually elaborates as the conceptual antecedent and basis of the  
 Firm's operations. A divinely-ordained Elect has been supplanted by the  
 corporate "Chosen": Vanitas - V. - takes the place of the Word in a

commerce-centered quasi-figural system. So young men still are "initiated at Harvard into the Puritan Mysteries (...) to respect and to act always in the name of Vanitas, Emptiness, their ruler..."(pp267-68). Among them Slothrop discovers that "Harvard's there for other reasons. The 'educating' part of it is just sort of a front"(p.193); he finds that a sinister order now lurks beyond the secular. But the extent to which he has been determined by Their doctrine of Vanitas is open to doubt, a doubt located in Slothrop's residual symbolic awareness. Within the signs that surround him, it is the trace of an extra-creational presence that "scares the shit out of him"; Slothrop fears the rocket strikes as he fears being smitten by the apocalyptic Word: "the one Word that rips apart the day"(p.25). The Puritan hermeneutic, in contrast, is based upon an essentially metaphoric epistemology. Nature is construed as a sign-system that only indicates, can only point to, the presence of the deity. It is a text of extrinsic value as a referential medium, lacking the intrinsic significance of the symbol.<sup>5</sup> And from this denial of sacred interiority - the theomorph - follows the recognition of Emptiness or Vanitas. For if the interpretative assumption of Presence is withdrawn, then the referential function of a nature-text collapses into Absence and non-meaning; it assumes the status of a phenomenal tautology.

Historically, the Slothrops appear to have been reluctant to surrender this referential awareness. "Heretical" William Slothrop had advocated a place and significance within the providential scheme for the "Preterite", those "passed over" by God; later "Slothrop Regulators" sided with the rebels against the Federalists, wearing sprigs of hemlock rather than "tatters of white paper" in their hats as tokens of this choice.

They were still for the living green against the  
dead white. Later they lost, or traded away

knowledge of which side they'd been on.

Tyrone here has inherited most of their bland ignorance on the subject. (p.268).

It is from this "bland ignorance" of the very existence of "sides" that the incorporation of the Slothrop, into the Firm, seems to follow. Yet it is not a particularly successful merger for them; the family survives but does not prosper and is subsequently located on the periphery of the Elect. Without power or "money in the Puritan sense - an outward and visible O.K. on their intentions"(p.652) - the Slothrop ever threaten to collapse into the Preterite. And Tyrone is "Last of his line, and how far-fallen - no other Slothrop ever felt such fear in the presence of Commerce"(p.569). His response may be fear, but his sensitivity to the presence of "Commerce", just as he is sensitive to assumed presences in all signs, is his usefulness to the Firm. "There is in his history, and likely, God help him, in his dossier, a peculiar sensitivity to what is revealed in the sky"(p.26).

The Firm is not identified by the narrative with any specificity, as a noumenon it is manifest in its representatives: Lazlo Jamf, the meta-cartels, Blicero and, initially, PISCES (Psychological Intelligence Schemes to Expedite Surrender) which is housed by "The White Visitation". And it is to the attention of The White Visitation that Slothrop's peculiar hermeneutic capability is first brought. Their interest focuses upon his relation to the V-2 rocket, particularly the isomorphic relation between Roger Mexico's statistical map of rocket strikes on London and the topography of Slothrop's sexual exploits. Attempts to discover the significance of this co-incidence reveal a number of cognitive approaches to the problem of explicating hidden meaning. This comes down to the question of dealing with metaphoric ambiguity. Slothrop himself transforms the rocket's approach into a kind of "metafore-play",

perceiving in it the trace of something to which he responds sexually. Subsequently, the scientists, psychologists and spiritualists of The White Visitation construct this response as a metaphor, the visible sign of a "mystery stimulus" which is variously diagnosed as precognition, "a statistical oddity", psychokinesis, even a psychotic misogyny. The Pavlovian behaviourist, Pointsman, however speculates in terms of a purely materialist cause to explain the effect, a cause which would attach to the mechanics of the rocket. Pointsman's experimental work centers on the search for a rational mechanism that determines the relation between the cortex and the world, viewed as discrete areas of "Inside" and "Outside". This is more than his work, it is his mission, a mission that he conceives of with urgency: to determine the mechanics of the brain and so expand the dominion of control.

Slothrop's case though appears to undermine the set of symmetries upon which Pointsman's theorising is based. The supersonic V-2 to which he responds impacts before the sound of its approach is heard and the rocket strike, this supposed stimulus, is preceded by Slothrop's sexual response - "The mean lag is about  $4\frac{1}{2}$  days"(p.86). "Ideas of the opposite" are certainly confused. Confronted with this apparent subversion, Pointsman becomes obsessed with a need to prove the Pavlovian concept of the "ultraparadoxical phase" - wherein a negative stimulus produces a paradoxical response - and to identify precisely the nature of the rocket-stimulus.

- damn it, what cue, right in front of our eyes,  
that we haven't the subtlety of heart to see?...  
(...) When we find it, we'll have shown again the  
stone determinacy of everything, of every soul.  
There will be precious little room for any hope  
at all. You can see how important a discovery like

that would be (p.86).

Pointsman's philosophy allows no place for indeterminacy or for hidden meaning either. All must have a discoverable cause, function and significance, clearly written on the cortex(t) in "a mosaic of tiny on/off elements"(p.55), a text which is made legible by reference to "The Book" - Pavlov's letters to Pierre Janet.

It is this interpretative authority - the Pavlovian pretext - that Slothrop threatens; in response, Pointsman determines to send Slothrop "transmarginal" and ultimately "ultraparadoxical". He transforms Slothrop himself into a cryptogram, in such a way that Pointsman's hermeneutic quest provides an external motivation for the allegoric quest. Initially, this quest is circumscribed by Them, and is manipulated to serve more than one of Their purposes. Pointsman finances his personal plot by enlisting the aid of Clive Mossmoon and ICI, thus incorporating it into the larger political context - the international post-War scramble for German rocket technology. Relying upon Slothrop's WASP-reflex horror of all things black - exemplified by his nightmare-vision of a descent into the toilet, a journey that reveals his cultural phobias of defecation, death, blacks and buggery - They send him into the Zone to locate and destroy the Schwarzkommando rocket program. Slothrop is "a good try at a moderate solution"(p.615). Therefore, the common denominator underlying these various aspects of the quest is the self which has been determined, to a considerable extent, by cultural and family history. "Shit, money and the Word, the three American truths, powering the American mobility, claimed the Slothrop, clasped them for good to the country's fate"(p.28). Like the elements of any ideology, these three "truths" operate subliminally; they may be inscribed upon the ego of Tyrone Slothrop, conditioning his responses and his hermeneutic, but he remains unconscious of them.

That is, until he is mysteriously deprived of his identification papers, the written validation of his conscious self, and is obliged to seek redefinition. Then, these determining forces take on the appearance of a conspiracy and his identity that of a text written by Them. Made vulnerable by the suspiciously controlled circumstances in which he is literally stripped - his clothes, papers, friends all disappear - Slothrop begins to perceive a sinister dimension of meaning in otherwise commonplace signs. So the paraphernalia of the Casino Hermann Goering assume an additional signification.

These are no longer quite outward and visible signs of a game of chance. There is another enterprise here, more real than that, less merciful, and systematically hidden from the likes of Slothrop (p.202).

This is, obviously, a figural mode of perception - signs are displaced from their conventional signifying relationships to encompass an alternative, metaphoric, reference. Closely allied to paranoia, postmodernist figuralism reveals an ominous secular design which contains the potential for a satanic analogue. And it is in terms of this quasi-figural system - "an order whose presence among the ordinary debris of waking he has only lately begun to suspect"(p.202) - that Slothrop seeks his identity. The speculative presence of this alternative "order of being" is augmented to some degree by "Proverbs for Paranoids",5:

Paranoids are not paranoids (...) because they're paranoid, but because they keep putting themselves, fucking idiots, deliberately into paranoid situations (p.292).

In these situations, such as Slothrop's at the Casino, signs or figurae "find" them, pointing to the existence of a plot: "it's a plot it's a plot it's Pavlovian conditioning!"(p.294).

Yet the traces of the "Presence" that Slothrop is beginning to perceive are cast not in the terms of a secular manufactured force but in satanic terms, those of "the Beast". He is

Worried, all right. By the jaws and teeth of some Creature, some Presence so large that nobody else can see it (...). Well, Slothrop can feel this beast in the sky! its visible claws and scales are being mistaken for clouds and other plausibilities ... or else everyone has agreed to call them other names when Slothrop is listening. ... (p.241).

Sensitized to the idea of polyvalent meaning, the notion that mundane signs may be put to extra-mundane uses and so signify a kind of transcendental signifier at work in events, Slothrop pursues the meaning of "Impolex-G". His confrontation with this cryptogram is prefaced by a recollection of earlier Slothropps, who read the world as "Data behind which always, nearer or farther, was the numinous certainty of God" (p.242). The reassertion of this ancestral memory indicates that Tyrone seeks not the numinous but the noumenon; forces different in nature but of the same ontological status. Certainly he anticipates an explanation of Impolex-G that will exceed its function in a German parts list: "Scales and claws, and footfalls no one else seems to hear. ... "(p.242).

These expectations are further excited not by Impolex-G however, but by his investigation of its creator, Lazlo Jamf, and a relation between Jamf and his self. By taking advantage of the post-War information market Slothrop is able to obtain a copy of the Sandoz files, the

text of Jamf's dealings with the chemical cartels. Perched atop Jamf's crypt in Zurich, Slothrop attempts to de-crypt Jamf. "There's no visit. It seems Jamf is only dead"(p.268). Instead he decodes his own psychobiography, written in the papers. He reads - what The White Visitation has known all along - his identity as "Baby Tyrone", the subject of Jamf's Harvard experiments in conditioned response. The "mystery stimulus" to which he was conditioned is defined now, emerging syncretically from this cluster of coincidences, a tangle of textual references. Fear and dread overwhelm him,

He is also getting a hardon, for no immediate reason. And there's that smell again, a smell from before his conscious memory begins, a soft and chemical smell, threatening, haunting (...) he knows that what's haunting him now will prove to be the smell of Impolex-G (pp.285,286).

And his erect response to the stimulus is identified as a metaphor, "a colonial outpost (...) representing Their white Metropolis far away" (p.285). However, the extent to which the representational function of the sign disrupts an otherwise synonymous relationship, wherein Slothrop and Them are one, is ambiguous. Slothrop reacts to the knowledge that he has been coopted into the Firm with horror: "I've been sold, Jesus Christ I've been sold to IG Farben like a side of beef"(p.286). But the possibility of a complete, definitive, identification between himself and Them is posed unconsciously, in a recurring nightmare - reading in a dictionary the word "JAMF", the "definition would read: I. He woke begging It no"(p.287). The degree of Their control of his identity, Their definition of him, therefore becomes a primary object of the quest, one closely allied to the search for the Schwarzgerat."

This alliance between Slothrop, Impolex-G and the Schwarzgerät<sup>"</sup> introduces him to the "connectedness" that characterizes the noumenon. Faced with the possibility that his personality may have been synthesized, like the molecules of Impolex-G, still Slothrop does not realize "how molecular is the nature of words". He does not recognize in his code name, "Schwarzknabe", or that of his father, "Schwarzvater", a controlled predisposition to seek "black", specifically the "black-instrument", the Schwarzgerät<sup>"</sup>. Both Tchitcherine and Enzian will wonder at Slothrop's involvement with blackwords, but he himself does not. Perhaps this is an aspect of Slothrop's general obtuseness when it comes to perceiving plots other than that centering on his self. For he is, essentially, an explicit case of a more pervasive program of cultural conditioning. "Pirate" Prentice possesses the self-awareness to know that "Like every young man growing up in England, he was conditioned to get a hardon in the presence of certain fetishes, and then conditioned to feel shame about his new reflexes"(p.72). Slothrop's conditioning is so explicit as to approach the parodic. But, set in the context of scientific experimentation, it is indicative of Their corruption of psychology, particularly, by putting it to an insulative use: to manipulate certain responses and inhibit others. Slothrop seems to undermine this system: he is a product of it, yet his response to the rocket introduces an uncertainty which necessarily is located beyond its scope. The uncertainty that he represents leads Pointsman to perceive him as "physiologically, historically, a monster".

We must never lose control. The thought of him lost in the world of men, after the war, fills me with a deep dread I cannot extinguish. ... (p.144).

Jamf's manipulation of Baby Tyrone is symptomatic of Their drive towards

stable, controllable meaning-systems. The determination of behaviour, of the psyche, forms only one aspect of the noumenon, a "Faustian" project to "redeem" nature by recreating reality in Their image so that their "tiny desperate fraction (keeps) showing a profit"(p.412).

"  
Leni Pokler - alone of those who do not belong to Them - intuits this design; in the attempt to articulate it she casts it in terms of a metaphor: Pluto "the new planet", named for the god of the infernal regions.

It is the grim phoenix which creates its own  
holocaust ... deliberate resurrection. Staged.  
Under control. No grace, no interventions by  
God. Some are calling it the planet of National  
Socialism (...). They don't know they are telling  
the literal truth. ... (p.415).

Like V., It - Them - is a design revealed in historical events, manifest in hermeneutic modes. Jamf's involvement in this design extends beyond his work in behavioural psychology and into chemistry. He was among the first to read in the polymer "an announcement of Plasticity's central canon: that chemists were no longer to be at the mercy of Nature"(p.249); when translated into "Plasticity's virtuous triad" of physical properties "often these were taken for Nazi graffiti"(p.250). It is in plasticity that the origin of the cartels - of the noumenon in fact - is located. Kekulé's dream of "the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth" provides not only a vision of the structure of the benzene molecule and the text for a new aromatic chemistry, but the grounds for "new methods of synthesis"(p.412) and Their characteristic method of interpretation: "The Serpent that announces 'The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally-returning", is to be delivered

into a system whose only aim is to violate the Cycle. Taking and not giving back (...)"(p.412). They construct the Serpent not even as a parable of "'Once, only Once...' One of Their favorite slogans. No return, no salvation, no Cycle"(p.413). Rather, they take the image and reduce it, endowing it with a narrow secular meaning which inhibits its range of signification.

No: what the Serpent means is - how's this - that the six carbon atoms of benzene are in fact curled around into a closed ring, just like that snake with its tail in its mouth, GET IT? (p.413).

Having reduced the question of eternal return, "the Cycle", to an irrelevance, the Dream is reinterpreted as an injunction to synthesise, to control by every means, to stage a "deliberate resurrection". The interpretative center of the "text" is shifted so that the Serpent enters "our ruinous garden, already too fouled, too crowded to qualify as any locus of innocence (...)" not to destroy but to define to us the loss of (...) the Serpent whispered, 'They can be changed, and new molecules assembled from the debris of the given'"(p.413). The new Eden is not to be a redeemed, newly returned, "locus of innocence" but a rationalized province of absolute control over which "Analysis" - the latest manifestation of Original Sin - presides.

The benzene ring, like that of the Nibelungen, is taken, interpreted away, from the world and coopted, like Slothrop, into the System. And it is used systematically to deny the cyclical continuum signified by the Serpent. As Impolex-G the ring is synthesised into a plastic that imitates nature, an imitation which includes however a crucial modification of the "fallen" original - it is controllable. Jamf's "Peculiar Polymer", again like Slothrop, is erectile but in response to

an electronic stimulus. The stimuli can be applied in one of three ways: through a surface matrix of wires; by a beam-scanning system directed at "grids and modulation plates" located on or beneath the surface, "down at the interface with What lies just beneath (...) the Region of Uncertainty"(p700); or by the projection of an electronic image "analogous to a motion picture"(p.700). Thus constructed, Impolex-G approximates the Pavlovian "mosaic" cortex : the interaction of "Inside" and "Outside" is encoded in its "tiny on/off elements"(p.55), predetermined by "grids and modulation plates". The plastic, from this perspective, realizes Pavlov's ideal of "the true mechanical explanation"; it provides the model for "a pure physiological basis for the life of the psyche. No effect without cause, and a clear train of linkages"(p.89).

It is through the narrative of Franz Pokler that Slothrop encounters a corresponding susceptibility to electronic images or motion pictures in the human psyche. Accustomed to constructing a continuity from a succession of still frames both by his habit of dozing at the cinema and by the "daily rushes" at Nordhausen - the photographed A3 rocket launches - Pokler is "given proof that these techniques had been extended past images on film, to human lives"(p.407). He is bound to the rocket program by Their "promise" of his daughter's annual visits. At least a child is sent to him each year. The possibility that each child is different haunts him, but from these successive appearances he must construct a continuous identity, read in each of her images those signs of a single history which constitute a discourse of "the Same".

Of all Their constructions, film approaches most nearly the design of the noumenon. Film is created as a continuous, secondary image of "reality", it reifies a "deliberate resurrection" of nature which, like Impolex-G and the Pavlovian cortex, is amenable to "Analysis". But film surpasses the plastic's ability to imitate the "epidermal" properties of nature in its capacity to "counterfeit movement"(p.407). And it is

from this capability that the insidious quality of film proceeds. Because it can construct an empirically accurate representation of reality film is able, to an extent, to obscure its status as a projected rather than perceived image.<sup>6</sup> This is particularly the case with movie conventions which, in Gravity's Rainbow, are to be found equally in the texts of film and nature: only when employed in an incongruous context do they announce their artifice. So when Slothrop aids in the rescue of a small girl from the rubble of a ruined bomb shelter, "her first words were 'any gum, chum?'" and his cinematic expectations are fulfilled in her faint smile, "wow, a Shirley Temple smile, as if this exactly cancelled all they'd found her down in the middle of"(p.24). But he himself is not immune to the occasional compulsion to intonate like Shirley Temple: "'Oh my goo'ness', Slothrop keeps saying, his voice out of his control. It sure is embarrassing"(p.493). Again his compulsion intensifies a cultural determination, one which originates in film.

Der Springer, as the megalomaniacal movie director Gerhardt von Goll, prophesies a future in which the scope of this determinist cinema will be completed. To Slothrop's panic-induced insistence upon a distinction between film and actuality - "Springer, this ain't the fuckin' movies now" - he responds:

Not yet. Maybe not quite yet. You'd better enjoy it while you can. Someday, when the film is fast enough, the equipment pocket-size and burdenless and selling at people's prices, the lights and booms no longer necessary, then... then... (p.527).

Von Goll con-fuses reality and film imagery in this phenomenon of control. The discovery of Herero rocket troops "leading real, para-cinematic lives"(p.388) in the Zone comes upon him with the force of a

revelation; solipsistically, he construes them as the determined "effect" brought into being by his movie of a mythical Schwarzkommando. His film-centered discourse imposes a cognitive texture which insulates him from alternative interpretations of reality: the director is controlled by his movies just as are his audiences. The corruption of fictional modes so that they disrupt rather than reveal accesses to reality is not restricted to film: Pointsman's "world" is determined by "The Book" while Katje, Gottfried and Blicero live a fairytale - Hansel and Gretel. The legend is adopted as a cognitive barrier, a source of "absolutes" that define their identities and which becomes "their preserving routine, their shelter, against what outside none of them can bear - the War, the absolute rule of chance, their own pitiable contingency here, in its midst. ..." (p.96). It is against this "absolute rule of chance" that Their corrupt hermeneutic forms are designed to protect. But they protect through insulation, and so prevent knowledge of signs from the sky whether they are fatal or revelatory, whether they signify redemption or death.

It is to film specifically, however, that the definition of Slothrop's identity is linked, again via the medium of Lazlo Jamf. IG Farben, the cartel that owned "all interest in Schwarzknebe enterprise" (p.286) before it was sold to the precursor company of Psychochemie AG, used as an outlet Spottbilligfilm AG in Berlin, which organization sold at a cut rate film stock to Gerhard von Goll, particularly "Emulsion J" invented by Lazlo Jamf. The property peculiar to Emulsion J is its capacity to "render the human skin transparent to a depth of half a millimeter, revealing the face just beneath the surface" (p.387). So it enhances the film's ability to present an accurate image of human reality and also creates the potential for a manipulation of facial skin color. Jamf's involvement in Their enterprise is therefore comprehensive: ranging from the determination of behaviour to the

epidermal, the paracinematic and, through the drug "Oneirine", into the realm of "time-modulation"(p.389). These objects of control intersect with Slothrop's quest through the A4 rocket. The reversal enacted by the supersonic missile is likened by Pointsman to "A piece of time neatly snipped out ... a few feet of film run backwards"(p.48); the heterodoxy of the rocket, and of Slothrop's response to it, should therefore be liable not only to control but to analysis.

The nexus of film, the rocket's parabolic trajectory and analysis emerges in terms of the mathematics of calculus. Cinematic reality is more amenable than is "nature" to the dis-integrative approach of calculus; a "counterfeited movement" reified in celluloid is easily "run backwards", "snipped", broken up and reorganized. Film is vulnerable to "the German mania for name-giving, dividing the Creation finer and finer, analyzing, setting namer more hopelessly apart from named"(p.391). But the analytic process of "setting namer (...) apart from named" has a significance more sinister than those of alienation and control. The division of a movement into its component units or "segments of responsibility"(p.453) is the hermeneutic technique that underlies Their "order of Analysis and Death. What it could not use, it killed or altered"(p.722). Analysis is Their method of altering or reconstructing what They cannot use, reinterpreting and incorporating it into a secondary reality. - the noumenon - a meaning-system that is more easily controlled. Roger Mexico, the young statistician whose proximity to uncertainty and probabilities alienates him from the cause-and-effect model of scientific enquiry, at least initially cannot perceive this insidious design and so criticizes Pointsman's determinist quest for absolutes as futile.

(...) I wonder if you people aren't a bit too -  
well, strong, on the virtues of analysis. I mean,

once you've taken it all apart, fine, I'll be the first to applaud your industry. But other than a lot of bits and pieces lying about, what have you said? (p.88).

What They have to say about the "bits and pieces lying about" is largely irrelevant; it is what They then do with the pieces that is of the essence. And what They do is to reconstruct them as the component parts of "a rather strictly defined, clinical version of truth"(p.272).

Just as language, history - every epistemological mode - cooperates within the figural design of the numinous, so these modes, once corrupted by Them, conspire to produce this "version of truth" as the central signifier of the noumenon. Epistemology is corrupted as it becomes insulative, producing metaphors that disguise and obscure rather than reveal. If the activity of the noumenon was to be described in terms of the V.-disease discussed earlier, it would emerge as

... a particularly unattractive and discouragingly common affliction called tunnel vision ... Tunnel vision is a disease in which perception is restricted by ignorance and distorted by vested interest. Tunnel vision is caused by an optic fungus that multiplies when the brain is less energetic than the ego. It is complicated by exposure to politics.<sup>7</sup>

The system of the noumenon constitutes a culture in which this "fungus" proliferates and from which it spreads. Symptomatically revealed in a corrupt hermeneutic based on analysis and control, Their purpose is to constrain the "Preterite" to a "tunnel vision" through ignorance or lack

of communication that serves Their interest, vested in their "tiny desperate fraction" of the world. The War represents a convergence of all Their "cartelized" forces of rationalization and determinism and so, as a crisis in the progress of this disease, is a disclosure of the noumenon.

The narrator is prompted to a lengthy meditation upon the divisive effect of Their War and Their metaphysic by the realization of human community at Advent - a phenomenon so contrary to and yet apparently like Their design.

The War, the Empire, will expedite (...) barriers between our lives. The War needs to divide in this way, and to subdivide, though its propaganda will always stress unity, alliance, pulling together. The War does not appear to want a folk consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have engineered, ein Volk ein Führer - it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness but a complexity. ... Yet who can presume to say what the War wants, so vast and aloof is it ... so absentee (pp.130-31).

This "complexity", this "machine", is reminiscent of the Scurvhamite construction of Creation as "a vast, intricate, machine", in The Crying of Lot 49. But in the corruption of such Puritan hermeneutics, the "will of God, its prime mover"(p.116) has been supplanted by Them: the "blind, soulless (...) opposite Principle"(p.116) has assumed domination of the whole. Emblematizing this Principle is the War which bears only "some cruel, accidental resemblance to life"(p.131). There is nothing accidental however in Their design, which will not tolerate the concept of

accident. The War's resemblance to life, like Their propaganda, facilitates the substitution of a discourse about or construction of reality - the "deliberate resurrection" - for reality by disguising the nature of Their project. "Don't forget the real business of the War is buying and selling. (Death) serves as spectacle, as diversion from the real movements of the War"(p.105). As a "cartel-Creation" comes into being, even the politics that exacerbate tunnel vision conspire in an elaborate dance of disguise which obliquely signifies an "absentee" intention. Consequently, this system - the "complexity" of the noumenon in opposition to the "oneness" of the numinous - can reveal to the allegoric hero not the presence of "Truth" but instead an "Absence".

The difficulty of discovering even this, of the noumenon, is apparent in Their corruption of epistemological forms - the constructs through which the hero could know Their ontology. Like V. and the Tristero, one of Their characteristics is the disruption of cognitive accesses to Them: the hero can only "tickle (Their) creatures"(p.237). The secularization of Kekulé's Serpent is paradigmatic of this redefinition within all meaning-systems. Concomitant with "the grim rationalization of the World"(p.588) is the denial of all supra-secular significance. In his initiation to the Masons Lyle Bland discovers this, largely because he is a "throwback", one who is still sensitive to the presence of latent magic. A sort of Nefastian "sensitive", he has somehow escaped the rationalizing process whereby "Business of all kinds, over the centuries, had atrophied certain sense-receptors and areas of the human brain"(p.588). Similarly, the deaf-mutes encountered by Oedipa Maas possess an "extra sense atrophied in herself"(p.97), a capacity to respond to some quasi-Platonic order of reality.

It is in this notion of "magic" that a distinction between the texts of the numinous and the noumenon is located. Each is disclosed in a pseudo/figural system, but only the numinous can signify the supra-

natural.

Each plot carries its own signature. Some are God's, some masquerade as God's. This is a very advanced kind of forgery. But still there's the same meanness and mortality to it as a falsely made check. It is only more complex. The members have names, like the Archangels. More or less common, humanly-given names whose security can be broken, and the names learned. But those names are not magic. That's the key, that's the difference. Spoken aloud, even with the purest magical intention, they do not work (p.464).

Apparently it is to magic of this kind that Slothrop responds as he ~~exercises~~ a residual "subtlety of heart"(p.86) or unatrophied sense-receptor. Although the quest discovers his defined role in Their conspiracy, he still reads this plot in terms of his interiority context: the self which has been determined by Them. Bound by "his" assumptions about the nature of Their design and obsessed with his self, he does not recognize that it is to a "magical intention" that he is responsive: "that his conditioning has given him special powers of responding not to the rocket sound but to mysterious precursors of its arrival ... (a) capacity to read signs about the intent of the heavens ..."<sup>8</sup>

Within this context the rocket assumes an iconographical significance. Like all figurae, the rocket is a sign of an extra-creational presence and is valorized for the sacred significance which thus attaches to it. All of the major questers seek the Rocket 00000 as a "grail-text": a "Text" that deciphers and discloses the "Other" (allos). Tchitcherine would read in it the location of his half-brother Enzian, the "alter"-ego he is compelled to destroy; Enzian seeks the route to

an alternative Zone, a numinous "Eternal Center"; and Slothrop, of course, is searching for the trace of his true, immanent self. But these questers are all compromised - their quest for the Other is bound up with their involvement in "This", Them. And so is the Rocket. It is an ambivalent figura; as the product of Their technology, of Their death-dealing, it reifies the desire to "chuck a ton of Amatol 300 miles and blow up a block full of civilians"(p.521). Yet the Rocket is more than a unit in Their design: its construction appears to resist the constraints imposed by Their secularizing hermeneutic - the attempt to de-sign - and incorporates into its semantic polyvalence a numinous "re-sign-ation"

This resignation or reinscription of the numinous upon a rationalized world takes the phenomenal form of uncertainty, "singularity", irrationality - all those qualities antonymous to Their absolutes.

"I think of the A4," sez he (Thanatz), "as a baby Jesus, with endless committees of Herods out to destroy it in infancy (...) it really did possess a Max Weber charisma ... some joyful - and deeply irrational - force the State bureaucracy could never routinize, against which it could not prevail ... they did resist it, but they also allowed it to happen (...)" (p.464).

Here, Thanatz could well be describing the historical process whereby the allegoric pretext has been devalued. The Rocket is constructed as a text by the characters within the narrative and also by the narrative itself - the rhetorical gap between the two implying a characteristic pretextual polyvalence, that quality of ambiguity which necessitates such interpretations as the allegoric narrative. Unlike traditional

pretexts, the Rocket does not embody a culturally accepted visualization of the sacred but it does reify the traces of a latent numinous which may signify salvation. Thus, Gravity's Rainbow does not rely upon a single anterior sacred text but incorporates a pretextual history in the Rocket. Like Jesus - the archetypal pretext - the phenomenal Rocket is a product of the existing System, but its charismatic significance points to both the corrupt, apostatical, nature of Them and to a potential means of escape. The two realms of being are drawn together in the figurally-based pun. Achtfaden, the aerodynamics man, makes this discovery in the terms of his own, mechanical meaning-system.

"Atmen ... Atman ... not only to breathe, but also the soul, the breath of God ..." (...) "The Rocket creating its own great wind ... no wind without both, Rocket and atmosphere ... but inside the venturi, breath - furious and blazing breath - always at the same unchanging speed (...)"  
 Gibberish. Or else a koan that Achtfaden isn't equipped to master, a transcendent puzzle that could lead him to some moment of light ... (p.454).

It is this implication of something "other-wordly"(sic) in the Rocket that They are compelled to "routinize" and that Slothrop appears to read. His response is enigmatic simply because it manifests a residual pretextual awareness within a system that denies pretextual signifying forms. Il n'y a pas de hors texte, but there has been more than one hand at work in the "writing" of Tyrone Slothrop: something "extra" to Their codified Text. There is, for instance, "the hand of Providence" - loosely identified with Their Puritan origins - which "creeps among the stars, giving Slothrop the finger"(p.461). Alternatively, the

providential Word has been likened to "white rockets about to fire", the potential figurae of "other orders of being", in Slothrop's figural imagination. The pretextual function of the Rocket is to reveal analogies, such as this, which have been obscured by the noumenon; Slothrop's function as an allegoric hero is to explicate them. However, his access to information about the Rocket is uncertain. The Mittelwerke he knows, but "in the way you know someone is there"(p.299); through a paranoid intuition. And the resignification of the double integral sign - so central to ascertaining the figural status of the Rocket - is described in the interpolated narrative of Etzel Ölsch, Slothrop's cognitive relation to which is highly ambiguous. Again there is a rhetorical alienation of narrative from character, here indicative of the narrowed scope of Slothrop's quest. The signs of a numinous text are assembled in terms of him but the final construction into Text is a task shared by the narrator and reader and performed in the cognitive spaces that punctuate the hero's quest.

The transcendental signifier upon which such a Text would center is derived from the polyvalent double integral or more particularly its significance within "the dynamic space of the living Rocket"(p.301). as "the method of finding hidden centers, inertias unknown",

(...) a point in space, a point hung precise as the point where burning must end, never launched, never to fall. And what is the specific shape whose center of gravity is the Brennschluss Point? Don't jump at an infinite number of possible shapes. There's only one. It is most likely an interface between one order of things and another (p.302).

At Brennschluss Point the Rocket figurally discloses an acultural,

ahistorical absolute that is synonymous with "'heart', 'plexus', 'consciousness' (the voice speaking here grows more ironic, closer to tears as the list goes on) 'Sanctuary', 'dream of motion', 'cyst of the eternal present' or 'Gravity's gray eminence among the councils of the living stone'"(p.302). The speaking voice asserts a valorized presence - the center of a pantheistic continuum - that exists in the detritus of "some corrupted idea of 'Civilization'" and "a corrupted idea of 'the People'"(p.302): the analytic categories of Elect and Preterite upon which They operate. Ironically the narrator articulates this dichotomy between the noumenon and the traces of the numinous; the dissociation of "orders of being" is enacted in the utterance.

If the Brennschluss Point is an interface located in this dissociation, then so too are the Rocket that discloses it and Slothrop who tries to decipher it. An interpretative lexicon however must be constructed and from the echos of such narratorial ironies. But Slothrop is slothful; his only resource is "instinctual" paranoia. So his capacity, as a semantic "interface", to translate "other orders" into meaning as he transcribes mystical precursors of the Rocket's arrival into an obtrusive sign is compromised. He may have the hermeneutic potential to provide the terms of salvation, but the "sole" context of his reading is his interiority context. In the absence of an "ironic" narratorial perspective, Slothrop's discoveries may instead provide the basis for Their rationalization of the Rocket's "singularity". By translating the Rocket's mystery into the analyzable form of a text, he may yet be further coopted into the System.

Slothrop himself fails to distinguish between kinds of Presence. Paranoia, which once revealed a Puritan God, which even now discloses traces of the numinous, is predominantly centered upon Them, the cartel which is the textual source of Slothrop's absent self. Consequently, the quest becomes an obsession with this tabula rasa, expressed in the

search for a Word that will center the free play of signifiers that are Slothrop's interiority context. He confuses the figural significance of the "Rocket-as-apocalyptic-Word" with the pseudo-figural organization of Their "corrupted idea of 'Civilization'" - "the chain-link fields of the Word, shining, running secure (...) always tangible"(p.705). For the paranoid Slothrop, alienated in analogy and reading solely in terms of a conspiratorial context, "all signs resemble each other, all resemblances have the value of signs".<sup>9</sup> So a Word is a Word is a Word: he makes no distinction between their respective transcendental signifiers or indeed any judgement of value. His response to revelation - of the numinous and the noumenon equally - is fear. And while the signs around him assemble themselves into a conspiratorial structure, this fear increasingly inhibits his reading. Afraid that They will coopt him, he simply opts out of his readerly role.

He gets back to the Casino just as big globular raindrops, thick as honey, begin to splat giant asterisks on the pavement, inviting him to look down at the bottom of the text of the day, where footnotes will explain all. He isn't about to look. Nobody ever said a day has to be juggled into any kind of sense at day's end. He just runs  
(p.204).

But as the cartel, figurally disclosed to him at the Casino, assumes the stature of "the Beast" he forgets his earlier disinclination to seek hidden meaning. Hierophany, mysterious intimations of a cryptomorph, "scares the shit out of him" yet his attitude to the "order" that is revealed is ambivalent.

Although the intrusion of an extracreative presence is feared, he also desires the Word that would define his immanent identity. This

duality is emblemized when, responding to his first figural epiphany,

He steps back out, backward out the door, as if  
half, his ventral half, were being struck in  
kingly radiance: retreating from yet facing the  
Presence feared and wanted (p.203).

Their motivation of his quest is made possible by the external manipulation of this subliminal desire, the "sub-Slothrop needs They know about, and he doesn't"(p.490). Late in the quest Slothrop asks himself "What do I need that badly?"(p.490). But it is too late; the free play of his "psycho-signifiers" has advanced to an uncontrolled disintegration. So it remains for Boddine, addressing a Slothropian fragment, to identify this "something else. Something I must've needed (...) that grace" (p.741). Slothrop needs the "Other" as he "needs" personal grace: the knowledge of self which is defined in terms of some external system of control and connection. His tabula rasa self requires the projected or inscribed significance that originates in a providential scheme.- of either the numinous or the noumenon. And to this extent he is a willing member of the Firm. Like Jessica Swanlake his need for security, for shelter against "the absolute rule of chance"(p.96), is exploited by Them.

So his quest for the Rocket and its Schwarzgerat not only serves Them but preserves Slothrop, for a time, against "anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for very long"(p.434). It is his "holy" principle, a structuring routine: "he is one of the Faithful (...) Pilgrims along the roads of miracle, every bit and piece a sacred relic, every scrap of manual a verse of Scripture"(p.391). Still, his paranoia does induce a suspicion of the dual nature of his search, of the antithetical "Words" he is

pursuing.

Slothrop's dumb idling heart sez: The Schwarzgerat<sup>"</sup> is no Grail, Ace, that's not what the G in Impolex-G stands for. And you are no knightly hero. The best you can compare with is Tannhauser, the Singing Nincompoop (...) But what you've done is put yourself on somebody else's voyage (...) playing her, its, game ... you know that in some irreducible way it's an evil game. You play because you have nothing better to do, but that doesn't make it right. And where is the Pope whose staff is gonna bloom for you? (p.364).

Despite this self-conscious hesitation, Slothrop does persist with Their game - until he simply forgets about it. He scans over this apprehensiveness and makes no attempt to elaborate his suspicions or to understand the implications of his quest. In short, he ignores the need for an interpretative methodology.

His symbolic perception discloses the presence of both the numinous and the noumenon in secular signs and his pretextual awareness identifies the Rocket as a primary figura yet he constructs no definitions in order to index their significances. The lack of discrimination which characterizes his approach is located in "a failure of perception, or, in a more sinister sense, of will (you used to know what these words mean)"(p.472). We knew what these terms meant as the constituents of the Augustinian "inner word": a "theogram" or spiritual "shit-detector". Slothrop's will fails in the pursuit of understanding; he slothfully avoids developing a perception of the respective values of signs. As we have seen, Herbert Stencil understands the significance of V.'s semiotic system but lacks the will to articulate it; Oedipa

literally possesses the will to pursue hidden meaning but her access to understanding is irredeemably and metaphysically disrupted; Slothrop fails on both counts. He is too "far-fallen", too compromised by Them, to threaten by questioning the order that inscribes him with meaning.

Consequently, he fails at "Holy-Center-Approaching (which) is soon to be the number one Zonal pastime. (...) And tankers the likes of "Narrisch and Slothrop here will have already been weeded out"(p.508). His earlier approach to the "Rocket-Center", his descent into the Mittelwerke, was accompanied by "a terrible familiarity" signifying "a center he has been skirting, avoiding as long as he can remember"(p.312). As all extraneous "faces and facts", "camouflage and distraction", fall away Slothrop refuses to confront the epiphanic moment. He defers revelation by secularizing "the vain and blind tugging at his sleeve", choosing to call it other names - "it's only wind, only g-loads"(p.312). By the time he reaches Test Stand VII this deferment is spontaneous.

So here passes for him one more negligence ... and likewise groweth his Preterition sure. ... There is no good reason to hope for any turn, any surprise I-see-it, not from Slothrop. (...) But oh, Egg the flying Rocket hatched from, navel of the 50-meter radio sky, all proper ghosts of place - forgive him his numbness, his glozing neutrality. (...) Forgive him as you forgave Tchitcherine at the Kirghiz Light (p.510).

Slothrop's "Preterition" grows as he ceases to perceive the signs of election - of both the Elect and his own heroic role - in proportion to the thinning of his "personal density". Even the vacuity of his "inner word" is no longer a cogent space as his signifiers "scatter". So he is

incapable of making a figural correspondence between a personal theogram and the "Egg the flying Rocket hatched from".

By invoking the Test Stand thus the narrative designates it as a hieroglyphic, a figura of the Egyptian transcendental signifier Ammon-Ra.

... the living creator of the life of the world came out of an egg: the sun, then, was at first carried in an eggshell which explains a number of Ammon-Ra's characteristics: he is also a bird, a falcon ... But in his capacity as origin of everything, Ammon-Ra is also the origin of the egg. He is designated sometimes as the sun-bird born from the primal egg, sometimes as the originary bird, carrier of the first egg.<sup>10</sup>

Could it also be that Ammon-Ra is a mechanical bird (of pray) - a Rocket? Or is he simply revealed through the Rocket? This ambiguity is characteristic of all figurae. Certainly, as creator and product, signifier and signified, of the "originary" Egg he approximates the logos, the atemporal absolute that is independent of cause-and-effect categories. So Ammon-Ra subverts the question of the "Rocket and the Egg", the "logical, chronological, or ontological priority of the cause over the effect".<sup>11</sup>

In his "glozing neutrality" Slothrop reads none of these connotations; in his preterite "tunnel vision" he is, like Tchitcherine, an unwitting agent of Them. But Slothrop's laziness, that which makes him an allegorically illiterate reader, also makes of him an ineffectual agent. Because he is unable to fulfil Their quest, They eventually release him from their collective wills: he is divorced from Their plot. Tchitcherine, however, is involved with Them to a greater and more

explicitly sinister extent. He participates in Their corruption - insulation - of language; the very basis of all those forms of semantic devaluation previously outlined. The "deliberate resurrection" of language provides the methodological model for Their "de-sign-ation" of all sign-systems. They exploit the capacity of words to produce a corruption of understanding and, by extension, of society, in a postmodernist parallel to Langland's Lady Meed. The cognitive nexus of language, the ego and society is revealed to Slothrop by the linguist Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck as he explains the difference between the Gothic and the Old Norse runes that signify "sun". A broken line, substituting the earlier circle, "dates from a time of discontinuities, tribal fragmenting perhaps, alienation - whatever's analogous, in a social sense, to the development of an independent ego by the very young child" (p.206). The fragmentation of a holistic sensibility, of the "circular" world, as it is de-signated in words - literalized or alphabetized - is the process in which Tchitcherine participates.

An immediate result of the literacy he helps to develop is that

On sidewalks and walls the very first printed slogans start to show up, the first Central Asian fuck you signs, the first kill-the-police-commissioner signs (and somebody does! this alphabet is really something!) and so the magic that the shamans, out in the wind, have always known, begins to operate now in a political way (pp.355-56).

Cast in the analyzable form of language, the shaman's "magic" is channeled into a politicized "tunnel vision"; the oral communication of a pantheistic, holistic apprehension is disrupted and this continuity obscured. Listening to "an ajyts" - a tribal singing-duel - Tchitcherine

realizes that "soon someone will come out and begin to write some of these down in the New Turkic Alphabet he helped to frame ... and this is how they will be lost"(p.357). And those "sense-receptors" vulnerable to the spontaneous "presence" of meaning or "magic" will atrophy through disuse. But this understanding does not deter him from his immediate mission, to transcribe the "Kirghiz Light" - just as Slothrop was sent into the Zone to literalize the Rocket's magical singularity.

"Are you going to get it all?" asks Dzaqyp Qulan.

"In stenography," replies Tchitcherine (p.357).

A pun on "get" - to record and to understand - suggests that Tchitcherine will have a limited success. He will record the Aqyn's song of the Kirghiz Light but, ironically, the medium in which he interprets it will disrupt his cognitive access to it. For Their words and the Kirghiz Light are of incompatible ontologies.

If words were known and spoken

Then the God might be a gold ikon,

Or a page in a paper book.

But It comes as the Kirghiz Light -

There is no other way to know It (p.358).

The New Turkic Alphabet and the Kirghiz Light are elements of different semiotic systems: the Kirghiz Light can be apprehended only through an "immaculate perception", while Tchitcherine is too involved in the epistemology of writing to really "see" the Light - "He will see It just before dawn. (...) But someday (...) he will hardly be able to remember It"(p.359).<sup>12</sup>

Their language is constructed so as to obscure and deny presences

like the Kirghiz Light, Kekulé's Serpent, Slothrop's "monsters of the Aether". Late in the narrative the young witch Geli Tripping achieves, through her occult "magic", a vision of the world as a Pan-theistic presence: "Too violently pitched alive in constant flow ever to be seen by men directly. They are meant only to look at it dead, in still strata, transputrefied to oil or coal. Alive, it was a threat"(p.720). The living world with "a Soul in ev'ry stone"(p.760), a contingent and indeterminate world, contradicts Their absolutist ideology. Therefore it must be "killed" or its significance altered, deliberately redeemed. The earth becomes a static, inanimate system and the "Titans" - "wind gods, hilltop gods, sunset gods" - "are all the presences we are not supposed to be seeing"(p.720). As science reconstructs nature, and film, psychology, mathematics revise our perception of it, so too words are "resurrected" from the pantheistic continuity.

See: how they are taken out from the coarse flow -  
 shaped, cleaned, rectified, just as you once  
 redeemed your letters from the lawless, the mortal  
 streaming of human speech. ... These are our letters,  
 our words: they too can be modulated, broken,  
 recoupled, redefined, co-polymerized one to the  
 other (p.355).

More so than any other cognitive mode language acts as that aspect of the noumenon which disrupts communication, constructs the discrete categories of Elect and Preterite, and bolsters Their ideology: "a cooperative structure of lies"(p.728).

Among the most radical of Their lies, posited by the narrator, is the assumption that outer space is a "Vacuum" rather than a medium or "soniferous Aether"(p.697). The text of the noumenon includes no

vocabulary to describe such a medium, no words to manifest an inter-stellar continuity. Their discourse is instead prescriptive, preaching "an island of life surrounded by a void (...) not just the Earth in space, but your own individual life in time"(p.697). Tchitcherine is drawn to the Rocket, as he was drawn to the Kirghiz Light, by the implication of something "Other" (allos) to this text. The Rocket emerges "out of the other silent world"(p.726), the space that the noumenon seeks to fill. And its parabolic trajectory, analogous to a visible half of the cosmic Serpent, is "not, as we might imagine, bounded below by the line of the Earth it 'rises from' and the Earth it 'strikes' (...) It Begins Infinitely Below The Earth And Goes On Infinitely Back Into The Earth it's only the peak that we are allowed to see"(p.726). The parabolic sign manifests the Brennschluss Point, the point where burning must end, the center of gravity to which the Rocket is drawn before it is released into "an uncontrolled explosion ...

this lack of symmetry leads to speculating that a presence, analogous to the Aether, flows through time as the Aether flows through space. The assumption of a Vacuum in time tended to cut us off one from another. But an Aether sea to bear us world to world might bring us back a continuity, show us a kinder universe, more easygoing (p.726).

If the Rocket is and discloses an interface between "orders of being", it would be an interface between "vacuous" and "aethereal" orders, kind and exploitative worlds, controlled and indeterminate texts, the noumenon and the numinous. It would be the primary sign of a reconstructed logos. But as the figura of both Texts it is available to many interpretations: "the Rocket has to be many things, it must answer to a

number of different shapes in the dreams of those who touch it (...) it must survive heresies shining, unconfoundable ... and heretics there will be"(p.727). Their "heretical" attempt to routinize or "de-sign" the Rocket's significance can be resisted only through semantic polyvalence, a polyvalence that answers to the indeterminate nature of contemporary salvation.

The causes of "damnation" cluster around the destructive potential of the Rocket, "an evil Rocket for the World's suicide"(p.727), but by incorporating the signs of past and present apostasy this historical figura may also signify a future salvation. This dualism is reflected in the Rocket's "bitextuality" - its annexation by oppositional Texts - and is reified in the dialectical play of forces that manipulate its trajectory. Two centers of gravity work upon the dynamic Rocket: that which is disclosed at the Brennschluss Point and the gravitational force that originates "out of the other silent world"(p.726). Katje recognises that as the Rocket submits to the laws of ballistics "Something else has taken over. Something beyond what was designed in"(p.223). Although she seems to perceive some extra-literal significance in the sign, she fails to apprehend the dual tenors of the vehicle, instead reading "the great airless arc as a clear allusion to secret lusts that drive the planet and herself and Those who use her"(p.223). Rather than refer to a "transcendental" gravity, this trope signifies that which would be transcended - entropy. Webley Silvernail hints at this interpretation during his monologue to the animals caged at the White Visitation.

(...) it isn't free out here. All the animals, the plants, the minerals, even other kinds of men, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few (...) I can't even hope that (...)

They'll (...) stop using every other form of life without mercy to keep what haunts men down to a tolerable level (p.230).

What haunts men is entropy, the tendency to disorder and uncertainty that They seek to counter with stable, controllable meaning-systems, through a "deliberate resurrection" of entropic "Nature". This process is imaged by the Rocket's parabola, the controlled ascent which is "betrayed" into an uncontrolled explosion. The Rocket is, as Enzian learns, "an entire system won, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature"(p.324). But Their attempts to counter entropy through technological ordering - a kind of "demonic" sorting - are ultimately entropic. As Callisto and Stanley Koteks never realise, the conversion of energy that is this work produces inconvertible energy - waste.

So the Firm's fear of disorder and "death", which would be overcome through Their "order of Analysis and Death"(p.722) necessarily creates the "Preterite" waste that They fear and hate. This "waste" is imaged, in its most fundamental form, by "shit". A number of comic scatological images - the intractable bowl that clings to Pointsman's leg, for instance - culminating in the "Toiletship", "a triumph of the German mania for subdividing"(p.448), provide a shifting narrative focus for this fear. It is diagnosed finally, in linguistic terms, as the definition of "Shit'n'Shinola".

Shit, now, is the color white folks are afraid of. Shit is the presence of death (...) the stiff and rotting corpse itself inside the whiteman's warm and private own asshole, which is getting pretty intimate. (...) Shoeshine boy Malcolm's in the

toilet slappin' on the Shinola, working off  
whiteman's penance on his sin of being born  
the color of Shit'n'Shinola (p.688).

In contrast is the color white, the white toilet is "the very emblem of Odorless and Official Death"(p.688), the color that permeates "the toilet privacy of Their banks"(p.741). It is also the shade of the blank page that would precede the inscription of the noumenon.

Yet the cost of such institutionalized "bleaching" is entropy: the energy expended upon a system to bring it to a state of order and to maintain it; a quantity that increases with time. So like V. and, to a lesser extent, the Tristero the noumenon manifests history as an accumulation of detritus produced by the encroaching influence of entropy. Not surprisingly then the question arises: are They, like V., of an occult or even demonic ontology? The shell-shocked victims of the "War" are dubbed "Lord of the Night's children"(p.49); their ailments are "Abreactions of the Lord of the Night"(p.48); the White Visitation employs Reverend Dr. Paul de la Nuit; and living within the System is likened to "riding across the country in a bus driven by a maniac bent on suicide"(p.412) where the "Lord of the Night he is checking your tickets"(p.413). But whether the "Lord of the Night" is an avatar of Satan, the Prince of this world, the Father of all Their Lies, is an unanswered (unanswerable) question. Nevertheless, Their entropic enterprise could well lead to an apocalyptic heat-death of the universe if it were not for the long-range ordering influence of gravitation.

In the concept of gravity lies the possibility of spontaneous "resurrection" or cyclical renewal. This force, centered in "the other silent world", draws the Rocket into "the Ellipse of Uncertainty"(p.425) where it surrenders the struggle against "Gravity" and submits in an uncontrolled explosion. It is against the transfigurative pressure of

"Gravity" that They must struggle; it is within the context of "Earth's mindbody" that the texts of the numinous and the noumenon stage their most radical confrontation. Lyle Bland, through his magical sensitivity, discovers this

(...) that Gravity, taken so for granted, is really something eerie, Messianic, extrasensory to Earth's mindbody ... having hugged to its holy center the wastes of dead species, gathered, packed, transmuted, realigned, and rewoven molecules to be taken up again by the coalter Kabbalists of the other side (p.590).

However the Firm, exemplified by Blicero who represents the System gone pathological, interprets this nature-text as a "cycle of infection and death"(p.724). Weissman-Blicero is possessed by a Romantic despair or angst, a desire to disprove Wittgenstein's axiom "Die Welt ist alles was der Fall ist". And in his desire to transcend the limitations of perception ("language") he attempts to manipulate transcendence, a deliberate transcendence that is a corollary to Their "deliberate resurrection". Using Their means of control, particularly Rocket-technology, he seeks "the edge of the World. Finding that there is an end"(p.722).

The corrupt, entropic, nature of this search does infect Enzian. As the protege of Blicero his early indenture to the Rocket is his participation in "the sinister cryptography of naming"(p.322). The connotations of a few key words appear to Enzian as elements of a pattern or text that centers on the Rocket. So the significance of the North as a mythical region of death is intensified by the presence of the Rocketworks at Nordhausen, a town adjacent to that of Bleicherode."

Bleicherode, in turn, evokes the German figure of Death, Blicher, a name almost homonymous with Blicero - Weissman. In this linguistic texture Enzian reads a prophetic significance.

There may be no gods, but there is a pattern:  
 names by themselves may have no magic, but the  
act of naming, the physical utterance, obeys  
 the pattern (p.322).

By referring this pattern to the Herero history of "lost messages" - originating when "the sly hare who nests in the Moon brought death among men, instead of the Moon's true message"(p.322) - Enzian constructs the Rocket as a potential access to Truth: "Perhaps the Rocket is meant to take us there someday, and then the Moon will tell us its truth at last"(p.322). "There" would be that which defines Blicero's "edge of the World", the "Other" that Enzian terms "the Eternal Center". Perhaps analogous to the "mystical" Brennschuss Point, the allos would reveal not only a Herero destiny but also Enzian's personal identity.

In this Enzian's quest parallels Slothrop's; he seeks in the Rocket both personal and racial definition but, like Slothrop, his past compromises his capacity to discover fulfilment. Both heroes desire grace - definition in terms of an external "plot" - however both confront the dilemma of distinguishing "true" salvation from the machinations of the noumenon. Whereas Slothrop's Puritan ancestry disrupts his ability to differentiate between quasi/figural texts, the Herero tradition in which Enzian uneasily locates himself affects his conception of the mystical goal. He is influenced by a Herero hermeneutic that, while constructing nature as a text in the manner of Puritanism, assumes this world-text to be of a symbolic or pantheistic rather than metaphoric

character. As mentioned above, Puritanism valorizes nature only as the sign of "super-nature": because it has no intrinsic value as the locus of the logos it is vulnerable to Their exploitative practices. This essentially mechanistic hermeneutic opposes the holistic, pantheistic, epistemology of the Hereros that constructs nature as a "sentient rock". So in Sudwest a barren woman is buried to her shoulders in an aardvark-hole "to be in touch with Earth's gift for genesis"(p.316). But in the Zone, where the Erdschweinhohlers are "Europeanized in language and thought"(p.318), this cyclical spirit is obscure and ambiguous: "here in the Zone, its real status is not so clear"(p.316). Consequently it polarizes the Schwarzkommando into two major factions: the Empty Ones and the followers of Enzian, "Revolutionaries of the Zero" and seekers of the Eternal Center.

They share the Schwarzkommando insignia, the mandala that signifies an anterior tribal holism. The four interdependent elements form a unity in terms of the sacred center; "All the same here. Birth, soul, fire, building. Male and female, together. The four fins of the Rocket made a cross, another mandala"(p.563). The Rocket constitutes a Zonal equivalent of the old mystical vocabulary. But where Enzian interprets the Rocket in transcendental terms as the vehicle for a tribal return to the sacred "zone", the Empty Ones "calculate no cycles, no returns, they are in love with the glamour of a whole people's suicide"(p.318). The Rocket - revelatory and apocalyptic - is again coopted into oppositional texts. Yet both interpretations are based on the concept of tribal unity and the mandalic sign.

What Enzian wants to create will have no history.  
 It will never need a design change. Time, as time  
 is known to the other nations, will wither away  
 inside this new one. The Erdschweinhohle will not

be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place. ... (...) The Eternal Center can easily be seen as the Final Zero. Names and methods may vary, but the movement toward stillness is still the same (p.319).

The "stillness" of an atemporal, omnitemporal absolute is, from a temporal perspective, difficult to distinguish from the stasis of death. Like Stencil and Oedipa, Enzian faces the problem of locating a four-dimensional absolute from within the cognitive constraints of a three-dimensional world.

However, the Rocket appears to disclose such an absolute and its figural status would seem to be validated by its mandalic form. This apparent patterning provides the basis for a mythology, a hybrid of the European and Herero, despite the Schwarzkommando's alienation from both cultures. Myth is to be the route of "return" and the Rocket 00001 its vehicle. By duplicating and redeeming the archetype established by Blicero's Rocket 00000, Enzian hopes to make manifest the sacred signifying center which is the historical analogue of the "Hauptstufe", the core of the mandalic village where were kept "the sacred cattle. The souls of the ancestors"(p.563). As a transcendental signifier this is a defining absolute in terms of which all things cooperate as aspects of a coherent semiotic system. From a temporal vantage the locus of the transcendental appears as true North. Signs, interpreted according to "the logic of mandalas" point North - "Evidence and intuition (...) point to 000<sup>D</sup>: true North"(p.707) - the location of "The Kirghiz Light. The Herero country of death"(p.706). This "mythic-symmetric bearing" is

thus constructed as an intersection with the Other. So the Rocket, travelling North, at the Brennschluss Point, should in the terms of this text reveal "the specific shape whose center of gravity is the Brennschluss Point" and by crossing the "interface between one order of things and another"(p.302), should take the Hereros out of sequential time and into a timeless realm of absolute reality.

But the validity of this interpretation depends simply upon Enzian's capacity to interpret and, given his involvement with Blicero, this is questionable. His redemptive enterprise is the duplicate of Blicero's "deliberate transcendence" - although Enzian seeks the numinous he employs the trappings of the noumenon - they differ only in intention. And the purity of Enzian's intention is ambiguous; his definition of both the Rocket and himself has been tainted by the lesson taught by Blicero, "that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood"(p.324). As we have seen, the Rocket is a polyvalent sign participating in the texts of the numinous and the noumenon. In the absence of a defining absolute such as Enzian seeks the distinction between the two is unclear. He does substitute for Their cognitive mode of analysis a "statistical sensibility" that parallels the uncertainty represented by the Rocket, but in this he simply replaces Blicero with the Rocket as a source of knowledge and providential sign.

Consequently, Enzian's quest intersects with Slothrop's: like Them Enzian requires an interpreter, someone to decipher the Rocket's singularity. Slothrop appears as one capable of transcribing the Rocket's promised revelation into intelligible terms but he fails the Schwarzkommando as he fails Them. Instead, Slothrop's paranoia intensifies Enzian's own. The oppositional nature of Their relation to the Schwarzkommando he already knows, but the nature of the opposition is less clear. He suspects that "in fact it may be a giant cartel including

winners and losers both, in an amiable agreement to share what is there to be shared"(p.326). Still Enzian does not realize Their extent; he imagines a clear-cut opposition which excludes the possibility that he is working within "their time, their space, and he still expects, naively, outcomes the white continuum grew past hoping for centuries ago"(p.326). Confronted with Slothrop, a nominal agent of Them, he is led to confess to "the feeling that the occupying Powers have just about reached agreement on a popular front against the Schwarzkommando" (p.364).

Sensitized by Slothrop's paranoid-figural hermeneutic, that which reveals "Scales and claws, and footfalls no one else seems to hear" (p.242) in commonplace signs, Enzian finally recognizes that he has been "seduced" by the Rocket's textuality away from the "Real Text". But more than the Rocket itself, his past has compromised him, his Euro-Herero assumptions about the significance of "the pattern" - the "sinister cryptography of naming" - and the "Destiny" it appeared to encode.

(...) all right, say we are supposed to be the Kabbalists out here, say that's our real Destiny, to be the scholar-magicians of the Zone, with somewhere in it a Text, to be picked to pieces, annotated, explicated, and masturbated till it's all squeezed limp of its last drop ... well we assumed - natürlich! - that this holy Text had to be the Rocket (...) our Torah. What else? Its symmetries, its latencies, the cuteness of it enchanted and seduced us while the Real Text persisted, somewhere else, in its darkness, our darkness ... even this far from Sudwest we are not to be spared the ancient tragedy of lost messages, a

curse that will never leave us. ... (p.521).

Enzian's revelation is the discovery that he has mistaken the true nature of synthesis and control, the nature of Them and Their "anti-entropic" enterprise. Their insulative hermeneutic has seduced him from the alternative Text, the one that may contain "the Key" to salvation. And so, as he contemplates adopting Slothrop's interpretative role as a Destiny, he turns to "Earth's mindbody" as the True Text.

We have to look for power sources here, and distribution networks we were never taught, routes of power our teachers never imagined, or were encouraged to avoid (...) zeroing in on what incalculable plot? Up here, on the surface, coaltars, hydrogenation, synthesis were always phony, dummy functions to hide the real, the planetary mission yes perhaps centuries in the unrolling ... this ruinous planet, waiting for its Kabbalists and new alchemists to discover the Key, teach the mysteries to others ... (p.521).

"The planetary mission" may be entropy - the force that governs matter, that therefore governs technology and consequently the cartels, Them - or it may be the spontaneous though long-term ("centuries in the unrolling") resurrection of matter through Gravity. But these are not discrete categories; rather they are aspects of a single process that defines as false, "phony, dummy functions", Their modes of synthesis.

In the ruins of the refinery Enzian reads the causes of "damnation", of his own preterition, clearly written. This text has been offered to Slothrop several times. In Zurich, "The War has been reconfiguring time

and space into its own image (...) to other purposes, intentions he can only (...) begin to feel the leading edges of"(p.257). Later he turns his figural eye upon Berlin -

If there is such a thing as the City Sacramental, the city as outward and visible sign of inward and spiritual illness or health, then there may have been, even here, some continuity of sacrament, through the terrible surface of May (p.372) -

but his "I", constructed by Them, will allow no more than a peripheral questioning of these signs. It remains for Enzian to diagnose the spiritual illness symptomatically manifest on "Earth's mindbody" and to articulate Their causal involvement. To do otherwise would define him as one of the "eunuchs keeping the harem of our stolen Earth for the numb and joyless hardons of human sultans, human elite with no right at all to be where they are"(p.521).

The revelation of the noumenon is Enzian's epiphanic moment. The discovery of the false system of control within which he has been working, particularly the set of cognitive controls falsely imposed by Them, is the turning-point and, in a sense, the culmination of his quest. Referring now to the text of a ruined world, rather than the "sinister cryptography of naming", Enzian formulates an alternative interpretation of the Rocket. This new construction does not exclude the Rocket's function as a figura: within the terms of Enzian's "Real Text" it discloses not the direction of salvation but the nature of the false logos.

It comes as the Revealer. Showing that no society can protect, never could - they are as foolish as

shields of paper. (...) They have lied to us. They can't keep us from dying, so They lie to us about death. A cooperative structure of lies. (...) Before the Rocket we went on believing, because we wanted to. But the Rocket can penetrate, from the sky, at any given point. Nowhere is safe. We can't believe Them any more (p.728).

Within this context the Rocket is an irruption of uncertainty into Their closed and stable meaning-systems. Implied by its semi-circular trajectory is the cyclical process of construction, destruction and spontaneous resurrection that They attempt to suppress through an imposed semantic stasis. That this reading becomes apparent to Enzian through a shift of interpretative perspective reveals both the arbitrary nature of Their constructions and Their concomitant obscuring of alternative hermeneutics.

Only by questioning the validity of inherited assumptions can the Preterite even suspect the existence of a Design into which they have been coopted. For the System operates through a single, autocratic hermeneutic mode, an approach to interpretation that parallels Their lie about death: the denial of Return in favor of the doctrine of "Vanitas, Emptiness, their ruler"(p.268).

Death has always been the source of Their power.  
 (...) If we are here once, only once, then clearly we are here to take what we can while we may. If They have taken much more, and taken not only from Earth but also from us - well, why begrudge Them, when They're just as doomed to die as we are? (...) But is that really true? Or is it the best, and the

most carefully propagated, of all Their lies,  
known and unknown? (p.539).

The potential falsity of Their concept of death is the central recognition of the Preterite, motivating the embryonic Counterforce. It reveals the possibility that They may not in fact die, that the noumenon is immortal and that only the Preterite are condemned to die in what may be an endless cycle of servitude. The apparently indiscriminate death-dealing of the Rocket, removed from the interpretative context of Their ideology, becomes a controlled destruction: it implies that the operation of the noumenon is a conspiracy which defines the Preterite as mortal, as "waste".

The story of Frans van der Groov, Katje's Calvinist ancestor, provides a parable of this process. To the human Elect the Mauritian dodoes appear "ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody argument against a Godly creation"(p.110). So Frans is obliged to erase this "perversion" from the providential Text, to validate the "Design" and to prevent "a second Flood, loosed this time not by God but by the Enemy"(p.110). As the Preterite, the dodoes are doomed to die according to the terms of "what their round and flaxen invaders were calling Salvation"(p.110). This categorization was explicated by Max Spielman in Giles Goat-Boy: "there's got to be goats for the sheep to drive out, ja? If they don't fail us they fail themselves, and then nobody passes".<sup>13</sup> However, Their "Salvation" has meaning only within the text of the noumenon. Within the context of "Earth's mindbody", by dooming the Preterite They doom themselves.

The System may or may not understand that it's only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything

but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply (p.412).

Ironically the Design that Frans kills for, once adopted by Them as the System that uses the Preterite as an infinite resource in the battle against entropy, increases the likelihood of a "Satanic" apocalypse, a heat-death for the universe.

But the Preterite, constrained by an imposed "tunnel vision", lacks the perspective of the narrator and can only suspect, paranoically, the existence of an omnipotent noumenon. Tchitcherine is warned by Wimpe, the "IG Farben V-Mann", that "our little chemical cartel is the model for the very structure of nations"(p.349). He recalls this advice as the cartels' involvement in the Zone becomes apparent to him, revealing in the surrounding debris the shape of "operational death".

Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul. IG Raketen. (...) Tchitcherine is certain. Not so much on outward evidence he has found moving through the Zone as out of a personal doom he carries with him - always to be held at the edges of revelations (p.566).

From this minimal revelation of the noumenon Tchitcherine realizes the participation of his own Soviet state. And he begins to suspect that the Marxist dialectical interpretation of history shares with the Puritan basis of the capitalist cartels the same lie about death. History simply supplants Providence as a text of death. Again it is

Wimpe who enlightens him: "Religion was always about death. It was used not as an opiate so much as a technique (...). But ever since it became impossible to die for death, we have a secular version - yours. Die to help History grow to its predestined shape"(p.701). So he poses the question that is literally to haunt Tchitcherine: "if History's changes are inevitable, why not not die?"(p.701).

Tchitcherine finds that he has been duped by Their concept of death, that he has been allocated to the Preterite all along in his willingness to die. Exploiting his suspicion that he has been "passed over", They use his misguided personal interpretation of Enzian as the Other that has damned him so that he may locate the Schwarzkommando. The mistaken direction of his quest, like Enzian's, is directly attributable to Them. The difficulty of making accurate distinctions in the Zone arises from Their control of all information.

Those like Slóthrop, with the greatest interest in discovering the truth, were thrown back on dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies, all dancing on a ground of terror, contradiction, absurdity (p.582).

The noumenon operates through and so dominates all rational cognitive modes; traces of the numinous are manifest irrationally but it is only by suspecting Their opposite that the Preterite can know the hegemony of Them. In fact it is while under the influence of the drug Oneirine, "theophosphate (...) indicating the Presence of God"(p.702), that Tchitcherine is granted a "secondary illumination", a paranoid vision of the connectedness of Them. In the absence of coherent epistemological principles, this is all that the postmodernist allegoric hero can articulate. The signs of a false logos, "not yet blindingly One", the

epiphanic unity indefinitely deferred, locate the hero - Tchitcherine and Enzian - on the edge of figural revelation. Where the conventional hero becomes aware of a providential scheme that has been determining his identity all along, the postmodernist hero discovers that which disrupts access to every form of knowledge. So in The Faerie Queene Prince Arthur is able to read

The secret meaning of th'eternall might,  
That rules mens wayes, and rules the thoughts of liuing wight<sup>14</sup>

Tchitcherine and Enzian instead discover the System that controls the categories of Elect and Preterite, and which has assigned to them damnation: cognitive alienation and death.

In contrast, Slothrop is marked as a member of the Elect from birth - because and in spite of his family's peripheral social position. However, his gradual discovery of the implications of membership to the Firm, and his rejection of them, results in his growing Preterition. Franz Pokler too reaches a point at which he rejects the noumenon and "committed then his act of courage. He quit the game"(p.430). Slothrop simply refuses, finally, to interpret, to perform the readerly role required of him by Them. By declining to play his designated role as "scholar-magician of the Zone", he rejects the identity that They have inscribed upon him. Or rather, in rejecting this self he transforms his interpretative quest into something extrinsic and imposed: "Slothrop and the S-Gerat and the Jamf/Impolex mystery have grown to be strangers" (p.434). But as he relinquishes the Rocket-quest that has until now preserved the coherence of his identity, another set of signs take the place of Their conspiracy as a defining context. "Like signals set out for lost travelers, shapes keep repeating for him, Zonal shapes he will allow to enter but won't interpret, not any more"(p.567). An important

shift has occurred in the relation between Slothrop and his exteriority context. No longer is his self constructed as an interiority context relative to the plot that implies and determines it; the categories of "Inside" and "Outside" have ceased to be relevant as these Zonal signs begin to speak through him, as Slothrop's passive subjectivity becomes one aspect of a pervasive discourse.

Other ancestors, ancestors other than those of the Puritan Establishment, assert themselves. When Slothrop retires from his "detextive" work - the active seeking after the signs of an immanent self - an alternative, numinous Text is revealed through him. The familial antecedent to this alternative is recalled by the figure of "heretical" William Slothrop, author of On Preterition. William's heresy is his love for the Preterite. He "argued holiness for these "second Sheep", without whom there'd be no elect"(p.555). In so doing he attempts to rewrite Their text of salvation, to break down the hierarchy of death upon which it is based. William is motivated by love for his pigs, for a relation to "the Earth" which is excluded by Their ideology. They appear not as "ill-made to the point of Satanic intervention"(p.110) to William; from his perspective the preterite pigs are "possessed not by demons but by trust for men, which the men kept betraying ... possessed by innocence they couldn't lose ... by faith in William as another variety of pig, at home with the Earth, sharing the same gift of life. ..." (p.555). Where They designate all living things as doomed to die an absolute death, William perceives a different unity based on a shared "gift of life".

The memory of William Slothrop and his porcine heresy closely precedes Tyrone's appearance as Plechazunga, the Pig-hero. Earlier, Slothrop assumed the guise of an A4 rocket, as Rocketman, a persona that reified his quest for definition through the Rocket. Conventional allegoric heroes, as we have seen, encountered aspects of their psyches

reified in personification figures as they developed in the quest for self-knowledge. Slothrop's development is expressed in a form at once more and less literal. His personae are less "letteral" in the sense that personification figures act out the signifying range of a single word or concept. Yet they are more literal as he embodies the text from which he is seeking definition.

By adopting the identity of Plechazunga, Slothrop begins to surrender the ego that has been inscribed by Them. Already this ego has been fractured; They are manifest as traces of an absent self, leaving "Slothrop" an uncentered text. This fragmentation is most noticeable as his linear memory disintegrates, along with his sense of "the one-way flow of European time"(p.724). Slothrop begins to experience time as a series of discrete moments, of "successive stills", in the absence of a cohering, subjective perspective. In the terms of "Mondaugen's Law" this "anti-paranoia" is the absence of a personal "grid".

Think of the ego, the self that suffers a personal history bound to time, as the grid. The deeper and true Self is the flow between cathode and plate. The constant, pure flow. Signals - sense-data, feelings, memories relocating - are put onto the grid, and modulate the flow. Only at moments of great serenity is it possible to find the pure, the informationless state of signal zero (p.404).

Slothrop has discovered that "Signals - sense-data, feelings, memories relocating -" can be determined by Them and so the "flow" of the ego controlled. It is possible that without his "consciousness, that poor cripple, that deformed and doomed thing"(p.720) - without his mediating ego-grid - Slothrop may realize a numinous, "deeper and true Self".

The function of the ego as an inscribed "inner word" within the pseudo-figural organization of the noumenon appears unambiguous to the narrator: "The Man has a branch office in each of our brains, his corporate emblem is a white albatross, each local rep has a cover known as the Ego, and their mission in this world is Bad Shit"(pp.712-13). The Counterforce is defeated by this the extent of Their control; although they oppose the Firm still they work from within the pre-defined category of the Preterite: their opposition has already been accounted for. And they "are as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us"(p.712). But Slothrop eludes these categories; by the time the narrator can make these claims Slothrop is "one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell - stripped"(p.712).

Released from the conspiratorial network that has constrained him, alone with "Earth's mindbody", he has "been changing, sure, changing, plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose"(p.623). And as the mode of perception that characterizes this self is forgotten, Slothrop reads from a Rilkean text.

And though Earthliness forget you,  
To the stilled Earth say: I flow.  
To the rushing water speak: I am. (p.622).

As "Earthliness" - that which is of but is not "Earth", analogous to Their "deliberate resurrection" of Earth - forgets Slothrop, he is assumed into an alternative text. Perhaps there he discovers a "deeper and true Self", the "constant and pure flow" of subjectivity, as he utters "I flow". Certainly at this point he is "closer to being a spiritual medium than he's been yet, and he doesn't even know it"(p.622). Slothrop cannot know what he is: the surrender of his conscious self,

the rational I that is an aspect of the noumenon, precludes self-awareness. But in its place is an Orpheus-like pantheistic awareness. Although he is not conscious of it, the focus of Slothrop's interpretative eye has shifted away from the Rocket and toward what Enzian calls the "Real Text", the nature-text.

Still he is perturbed by the mystery of Lazlo Jamf, "the coupling of 'Jamf' and 'I' in the primal dream"(p.623), but he no longer seeks a solution in the obscurantist texture of Their conspiracy. Instead he perceives his entire environment as hieroglyphic, and consequently

Omens grow clearer, more specific. He watches flights of birds and patterns in the ashes of his fire, he reads the guts of trout he's caught and cleaned, scraps of lost paper, graffiti on the broken walls where facing has been shot away to reveal the brick underneath - broken in specific shapes that may also be read. ... (p.623).

The intention that has determined the "specific shapes" of these cryptograms is ambiguous: both the numinous and the noumenon would appear to have had an authorial - Providential - hand in the construction of this ambivalent if "realistic" text. The text is a realistic representation because these oppositional "Words" still both participate in the writing of the world; no authoritative Text has yet been located which would make a clear distinction between the two. But because Slothrop's perception is now unconstrained, because he can now perceive the Real Text in its entirety, he is able at last to realize his potential as a "spiritual medium". Sensitized by the Rocket to mandalic shapes, he becomes attuned to other "four-fold expressions",

crossroads, where you can sit and listen in to

traffic from the Other Side, hearing about the future (no serial time over there: events are all there in the same eternal moment and so certain messages don't always "make sense" back here: they lack historical structure, they sound fanciful, or insane) (p.624).

Slothrop approximates this atemporal or non-serial quality, having surrendered the conscious self that constructs historical time. By relinquishing as a goal the personal grace promised by Their pseudo-figural scheme, the grace he has been conditioned to desire, Slothrop has access to an alternative scheme. It is in terms of the "Other Side", a four-dimensional continuum perhaps analogous to the "Aether", that he finally realizes the identity that has until now been latent: "he becomes a cross himself, a crossroads, a living intersection. (...) Crosses, swastikas, Zone-mandalas, how can they not speak to Slothrop?" (p.625).

As the signs of a holistic sensibility - they have already been so defined in Herero terms - these four-fold tropes belong to the discourse that now speaks through Slothrop, rendering "him" inarticulate. But as he looks at the signs of preterite "Waste" this discourse does enable him to "make it all fit, seeing clearly in each an entry in a record, a history: his own, his winter's, his country's ... instructing him, dunce and drifter, in ways deeper than he can explain (...)"(p.626). Explanation requires a form of consciousness that Slothrop cannot attain, a rhetorical distance that is impossible now that he is spoken by a numinous "langue". Previously he spoke the discourse of the noumenon, a secular text that inevitably frustrated his quest for the numinous. Yet the persona of Rocketman held a potential significance which can only now, referring to a pantheistic text, become apparent. As "Rocky"

Slothrop was linguistically related to Felipe's "sentient rock"; through the pun, if he had known how to read it, Slothrop could have perceived "a form of mineral consciousness not too much different from that of plants and animals"(p.612). As it is, he must become an aspect of the numinous, a "spiritual medium", before he is aware of "Earth's mindbody".

(...) later in the day he became a crossroad, after a heavy rain he doesn't recall, Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of public clouds into Earth, wet green valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural (p.626).

Slothrop's vision of the rainbow parabola cojoined with Earth is an isomorph of the Rocket's trajectory, the visible half of a metaphoric mandala or cosmic serpent, a sign of eternal return. It is an epiphanic vision achieved, perhaps, in a moment of "immaculate perception".<sup>15</sup> But Joseph Slade's "doctrine of immaculate perception" does not provide an accurate description of the nature of Slothrop's vision. The numinous Text that Slothrop would passively perceive rather than project is not self-evidently real, it is not unequivocally there to be perceived. Throughout the narrative the numinous has been manifest in uncertainties, in the spaces of Their as yet incomplete Text. Rather, Slothrop appears to be granted a moment of "passive discursivity", when the source of "crosses, swastikas, Zone-mandalas" is revealed through him.<sup>16</sup> The rainbow forms an "Ur-text" or langue in terms of which all the signs of holism, of cyclicity, are the manifestations of parole. By its very nature the disclosure of the langue must form an epiphany, and yet the temporal revelation of the abstract source of Slothrop's numinous Text

must have a phenomenal basis: it cannot but appear through him.

However, the precise ontology of this sign is ultimately ambiguous. Later, Slothrop encounters its counterpart, a parody of the rainbow trope, within the text of the noumenon. Like the Antichrist, They have a semiotic response to every manifestation of the numinous. In the ruins of a Zonal town Slothrop finds

a scrap of newspaper headline, with a wirephoto  
of a giant white cock, dangling in the sky  
straight downward out of a white pubic bush. The  
letters

MB DRO  
ROSHI (p.693).

This "bleached" version of Slothrop's vision discloses death and destruction where fertility was revealed through him. It is a cryptogram, requiring active crosstextual interpretation before it makes any meaning, as do all of the Rocket's figural signs. And like the Rocket, Slothrop himself is now polyvalent. In his epiphanic moment, one among the numinous signs, he becomes a cryptogram. The nature of his vision is not in question but its value is. Either the moment of death, transcendence or hermeneutic insight (more accurately "outsight" or "exsight"), the telling of his vision requires that the interpretative framework employed in the reading of it, the cognitive assumptions that underlie any construction of it, be revealed.

This focus upon significance rather than literal meaning, value rather than character, extends into Slothrop's recollection of the quest. He no longer contemplates seeking the signs of his identity but envisages a search for Enzian's "Key that will lead us back, to our Earth and our freedom". The cognitive retreat of the langue leaves him desiring the signs of it, the traces of numinous value and significance

within the increasing hegemony of the noumenon.

(...) in each of these streets, some vestige of humanity, of Earth, has to remain. No matter what has been done to it, no matter what it's been used for. (...) finding it, learning to cherish what was lost, mightn't we find some way back? (p.693).

The Rocket itself was never a Grail; it has always been only the sign of his quest-object, pointing to but only partially embodying the Real Text. It has posed as a possibility the deceptive nature of Their ideology - "a corporate structure of lies" - but it is only as the medium of a numinous langue that Slothrop can read its participation in oppositional texts, its ambi-textuality. The image of the Hiroshima Rocket "has the same coherence, the hey-lookit-me smugness, as the Cross does. It is not only a sudden white genital onset in the sky - it is also, perhaps, a Tree. ..." (p.694). The "Tree of Life" or the "Cross of Death", Their archetype, the Rocket is a figura that manifests both the numinous and the noumenon; it is not the Text to legislate between the two, as Enzian and Slothrop would have had it be.

In the absence of a power to distinguish transcendental signifiers, two uncertain accesses to Truth remain: active interpretation and passive revelation.

(...) passing through the chambers one by one is terrible and complex. You must have not only the schooling in countersigns and seals (...) but also a hardon of resolution that will never go limp on you. (...) The other way is dark and female, passive, self-abandoning. (...) The glittering edge

widening to a hallway, down, up which the soul is borne by an irresistible Aether. (...) The numinous light grows ahead (...) (pp.749-50).

Slothrop, having abandoned his paranoid self to a passively discursive experience of the numinous, appears to have been chosen for enlightenment; his "monsters of the Aether" have borne him to an integrative vision. But if Slothrop's hermeneutic impotence results in a holistic epiphany, Enzian and Tchitcherine - passed over by the Aether - must rely upon a "front-brain faith in Kute Korrespondences".

The rest of us, not chosen for enlightenment, left on the outside of Earth (...) must go on blundering inside our front-brain faith in Kute Korrespondences, hoping that for each psi-synthetic taken from Earth's soul there is a molecule, secular, more or less ordinary and named, over here - kicking endlessly among the plastic trivia, finding in each a Deeper Significance and trying to string them all together like terms in a power series hoping to zero in on the tremendous and secret Function whose name, like the permuted names of God, cannot be spoken (...) but to bring them together, in their slick persistence and our preterition ... to make sense out of, to find the meanest sharp sliver of truth in so much replication, so much waste. ... (p.590).

They are caught in the dilemma of attempting to discover a figural pattern, through a figural hermeneutic, without the cognitive guidance of an

authoritative pretext. Enzian, particularly, must rely upon his reading of "countersigns and seals", hoping to discover the "tremendous and secret Function", if he is to effect a return to "the Eternal Center of Earth's mindbody".

Slothrop can provide no assistance: his self-less experience cannot be articulated, not even to himself. He can only hope for a manifestation of the traces of the Numinous; he cannot however act. The signs of his destiny, read from a Tarot-text, are "the cards of a tanker and feeb: they point only to a long and scuffling future, to mediocrity (...) to no clear happiness or redeeming cataclysm"(p.738). But within the context of the Zone, where all taxonomies are either ambiguous or officially defined, concepts like "clear happiness" and "redeeming cataclysm" are virtually meaningless. This is Enzian's difficulty: his success or failure depends upon his capacity to distinguish value from waste, the numinous from the noumenon. Even Blicero recognises the obstacle to his "deliberate transcendence": "There are ways for getting back, but so complicated, so at the mercy of language" (p.723) - at the mercy of the secularized language of the noumenon that he would escape. Similarly, Enzian must confront the cognitive barrier erected by a corrupted language; he must hope that there exist signs, "more or less ordinary and named", which clearly manifest a "Deeper Significance". But, like Oedipa, he faces the indeterminate nature of semantic presence: that which frustrates and maddens Blicero.

The single basis for a distinction between the numinous and the noumenon articulated by the narrative is "magic". In the absence of a valorized pretext, in a world dominated by Their hermeneutic routinization, this is the "irrational" force that would underlie a figural manifestation of the Numinous: "stringing signs all together" into a figural pattern that stands distinct from the "plastic trivia" of the noumenon. The secularized names of the noumenon are devoid of any

magical capability: "That's the key, that's the difference. Spoken aloud, even with the purest magical intention, they do not work"(p.464). As aspects of a pseudo-figural conspiracy these signs isolate; they induce paranoia as the method by which the individual is located within the plot; they reveal only a quasi-demonic Absence beyond the secular "connectedness" of the conspiracy. But they do approximate figuralism. Enzian is deceived by the pattern; disregarding the absence of "magic" he pursues "the sinister cryptography of naming", initially, in a sterile quest that could never disclose an ineffable Presence. In contrast, operational magic, the "Operational Word"(p.510), is grounded in the assumption of semantic presence. Oedipa, in her encounter with a derelict sailor, discovered "the high magic to low puns", the magical capacity of puns to draw realms of being into a significant continuity. Similarly, the images confronting Brigadier Pudding as he makes his way through a succession of antechambers to his rendezvous with the Mistress of the Night "are not malignant puns against an intended sufferer so much as a sympathetic magic, a repetition high and low of some prevailing form"(p.232). The incident may be of uncertain reliability but the narrator's sympathetic commentary suggests that this figural form may provide access to a discourse of the Same. In fact the unique property of magic appears to reside in this promised access to a numinous transcendental signifier - a prevailing quasi-Platonic Form - through the revelation of a significantly unified semiotic pattern. In these terms magic becomes the semantic equivalent of the "soniferous Aether", the medium that "might bring us back a continuity, show us a kinder universe, more easygoing"(p.726). The arbitrary nature of secular signification, the indeterminacy of secular semantics, would therefore be overcome by the magical conjuring of a numinous Presence, "with pencil words on your page only  $\Delta$ t from the things they stand for"(p.510).

The occult magic of Geli Tripping, the "World-choosing witch",

evokes such a presence: her search for Tchitcherine is guided by "the logic of mandalas" - a prevailing cyclical form - it is informed by her communication with Metatron, the Kabbalistic spirit governing the visible, and it culminates in a Pan-theistic vision of Earth's living "mindbody". Most importantly though, it is motivated by love. Magical technique "is just a substitute for when you get older"(p.718). The unifying, quasi-figural power of love transforms Tchitcherine's hatred for his half-brother. Blinded by Geli's love, he fails to recognise Enzian and so these mortal enemies come together as friendly strangers: "This is magic. Sure - but not necessarily fantasy"(p.735). The transformative, conciliatory power of love is analogous to the synthesizing function of Gravity, gathering, transmuting, realigning and reweaving signs into a Real Text. Through his love for Jessica Roger Mexico discovers this as an alternative to his statistical reality: "In a life he has cursed, again and again, for its need to believe so much in the trans-observable, here is the first, the very first real magic: data he can't argue away"(p.38). So when he loses her, he loses also this integrative, holistic apprehension, "a full range of life, of being for the first time at ease in the Creation"(p.629).

There are only limited possibilities for love in a world dominated by Them. Jessica is seduced, away from Roger, by her conditioned need for security. Only for the duration of the War's "absolute rule of chance" can she suspend this need. Similarly, the signs of this integration exist in semiotic interregnums, in pre-routinized spaces. So in its charismatic aspect, its "singularity", the Rocket-text signifies this figural unity. The double integral, "the method of finding hidden centers", is also the "shape of lovers curled asleep"(p.302). Love, like the mathematical integral, can signify and so partially disclose a numinous reality. Both, figurally interpreted, assume a significance additional to the secular. Within "the dynamic space of the living

Rocket" these methods of integration become signs of "an interface between one order of things and another"(p.302) - if pursued as figurae they disclose "singularities" such as the Brennschluss Point.

(...) there is a cosmology: of nodes and cusps and points of osculation, mathematical kisses ... singularities! Consider cathedral spires, holy minarets, the crunch of tramwheels over the points as you watch peeling away the track you didn't take ... mountain peaks rising sharply to heaven, (...) the edges of steel razors, always holding potent mystery ... rose thorns that prick us by surprise ... even, according to the Russian mathematician Friedmann, the infinitely dense point from which the present Universe expanded. ... in each case, the change from point to no-point carries a luminosity and enigma at which something in us must leap and sing, or withdraw in fright. Watching the A4 pointed in the sky - just before the last firing-switch closes - watching that singular point at the very top of the Rocket, where the fuze is. ... Do all these points imply, like the Rocket's, annihilation? What is that, detonating in the sky above the cathedral? beneath the edge of the razor, under the rose? (p.396).

Each of these signs is a figura; each possesses the magical potential to disclose an alternative order of being, an alternative text. But whilst they signify the existence of an alternative they designate neither its nature nor cognitive accesses to it - they contain no cues

to their interpretation beyond their shared function as figural interfaces manifesting an extracreative presence. Their "magic" resides in the potential to make present "the road not taken". And so this "magic" informs both accesses to truth: the active and the passive, the revelatory and the interpretative.

But this magic is also the primary object of Their routinization; it is the semiotic quality that They wish most to suppress through Their insulative hermeneutic. The Rocket, within Their "deliberately redeemed" culture-text, would no longer disclose concepts like the soniferous Aether and Earth's mindbody that put into question Their techniques of isolation. They have achieved the secularization of all "rational" cognitive modes - language, science, film, psychology, mathematics - so there remain only the irrational, the "magical", to be annexed: "Dreams, psychic flashes, omens, cryptographies, drug-epistemologies"(p.583). Then there would be no medium to disclose the numinous. They have bureaucratized the phenomenal, psychological and occult realms in the attempt to defeat entropy, despite the endless nature of the conflict, despite even the advice of Walter Rathenau, one of Their own.

The real movement is not from death to any  
rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured.  
The best you can do is to polymerize a few dead  
molecules. But polymerization is not resurrection:  
(p.166).

The advice goes unheeded because "rebirth" is not what They want. It is in fact what They fight. "In this latest War, death was no enemy, but a collaborator"(p.616). As Blicero's name suggests, They struggle against the "spontaneous resurrection" of Gravity in the desire to achieve a "bleached" reality: dead and absolutely controllable.

The allegoric hero - Slothrop, Enzian, Tchitcherine - is compromised by the pervasive nature of Their methods of synthesis and control. The text they must read from is corrupted, as are the hermeneutic modes they must employ and the context in which they move is peopled by "generation after generation of men in love with pain and passivity (...) willing to have life defined for them by men whose only talent is for death"(p.747). Slothrop and Enzian, Tchitcherine to a lesser extent, are marked as heroic simply by their refusal to accept the hegemony of the noumenon - whether this refusal is conscious or not - and by their sensitivity to magical traces of the numinous.

The success of their various quests is ambiguous, as is the nature of the dispensation offered by the figural Rocket. As metaphor the Rocket holds the promise of other orders of being, at the Brennschluss Point it discloses an atemporal absolute antonymous to the noumenon. Yet it ascends as the product of Their death-dealing technology, the prodigy of Their "deliberate resurrection" of entropic Nature. At Brennschluss They must however surrender Their control; at this point Gottfried perceives "a Brocken-specter, someone's, something's shadow" (p.759), "God-shadows"(p.330). But no sooner has this "single point" appeared to him than he is borne by the Rocket in an uncontrollable descent, into the "Ellipse of Uncertainty" and death. The Rocket is subject to the destructive and creative control of Gravity. Its trajectory is consummated when its visible parabola becomes a mandala, when Gravity has "hugged to its holy center" the Rocket-waste, "gathered, packed, transmuted, realigned, and rewoven molecules to be taken up again by the coaltar Kabbalists of the other side"(p.590). With a primary text as ambi-textual as this it should not be surprising that the allegoric hero cannot achieve a clearly defined success or failure. But an awareness of the nature of the text and its relation to the Real Text could be classified a success. For from this discovery follows

that of self-definition, the recognition of the discourse that their subjectivities speak, and this has after all been a primary object of the quest. So for Slothrop, Enzian and Tchitcherine the quest culminates in the recognition of a false logos, an Absence at the center of a "complex" quasi-figural structure.

Like all allegory the conclusion of Gravity's Rainbow is inconclusive and self-referential. The descent of the archetypal Rocket 00000 refers, crosstextually, to the narrative's beginning, explicitly invoking an apocalyptic, salvational context. As the Rocket is poised at Brennschluss above the Orpheus Theatre, "absolutely and forever" (p.760),

Each has been hearing a voice, one he thought was talking only to him, say, "You didn't really believe you'd be saved. Come, we all know who we are by now. No one was ever going to take the trouble to save you, old fellow. ..."

There is no way out. Lie and wait, lie still and be quiet. Screaming holds across the sky. When it comes, will it come in darkness, or will it bring its own light? Will the light come before or after? (p.4).

The traditional image signifying Christian salvation - light opposed to satanic darkness - suggests here an ultimate opposition between the numinous and the noumenon. But it also raises the question: what will come? The numinous, signified by the Rocket, offers the dual possibilities of either transcendence into another order of being or death; the noumenon brings only the certitude of death. This unsolved problem, the problem that the heroes failed to solve - a definitive distinction

between the numinous and the noumenon - forces the reader into a position of hermeneutic self-consciousness. The heroes' failure, the failure of all postmodernist allegoric hero/ines, to complete the quest requires that readers choose between opposing texts by locating their own legislative Texts; pretexts. Consequently, this is to question the extent of their own interpretative control by "The Man"; "Now everybody—"

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION: CONSTRUCTIONS AND CRYPTOMORPHS

The allegoric structure of Gravity's Rainbow is not easily discernible. Reading Gravity's Rainbow is a complex, complicated and often confusing experience. It "is not a disentanglement from, but a progressive knotting into"(p.3) an interlaced texture of quests.<sup>1</sup> Because we are deprived the cognitive focus of a single quest or story-line the logic of the narrative's construction is somewhat obscured. In contrast to the allegories discussed earlier, several quests make up the plot of Gravity's Rainbow which, as a unit, does correspond to the generic structure of allegory.

In the first section, "Beyond the Zero", the "fallen" condition of the Zone is established, primarily in terms of Slothrop's manipulation by Them. His ambivalent desire for grace - his fear of and need for a centering Word - finds a parallel in the interpolated story of cell life. In this parable of the Fall, of spiritual alienation, the Central Nervous System corresponds to a "core of being", a present logos, to which there is no return. The young cell, as part of his brief on the facts of postlapsarian life, is informed that "We all go up to the Outer Level, young man. Some immediately, others not for a while. But sooner or later everyone out here has to go Epidermal. No exceptions" (p.148). Going "Epidermal" means a change "to horn, and no feeling, and silence"(p.148). His expectation of a numinous return disillusioned, the young cell still resists this destiny: "we're in exile, we do have a home! (...) Back there! Not up at the interface. Back in the CNS!" (p.148). This comic parable encapsulates the major quest theme of Gravity's Rainbow. All the heroes are seeking "the key that will bring us back, restore us to our Earth and to our freedom"(p.525) - a restoration to the transcendental CNS - but they are opposed by the forces of

the noumenon which manipulate their destinies in the direction of the Epidermal. Slothrop is the most obviously manipulated of the heroes. His experience of the Firm's determinism introduces the concept of cognitive insulation as "Subsequent Sin". But opposed to it is his peculiar response to the uncertainty represented by the Rocket. Consequently, from this there emerges a dilemma: "what is the real nature of synthesis? And then: what is the real nature of control?"(p.167).

"Un Perm 'au Casino Herman Goering" begins the movement towards solution of this problem by developing the hero's - Slothrop's - ability to interpret. In the Casino, completely the subject of the Firm, Slothrop is privy to all Rocket information. His circumstances, as much as his discoveries about the conditions of the Rocket's production, nurture his already blossoming paranoia to the extent that he begins to read all signs as figurae, pointing to the existence of a hidden order: "Scales and claws, and footfalls no one else seems to hear"(p.242).

It is not until section three, when he is "In the Zone", that Slothrop realizes that he has been sold to the cartels, "sold to IG Farben like a side of beef"(p.286). Subsequently he adopts the persona of Rocketman as he attempts to discover his own identity in the Rocket-text and its Schwarzgerat. During this stage of the quest he encounters Franz Pokler and learns from him, through the story of Kekule's Serpent, the hermeneutic peculiar to the noumenon. An awareness of the extent of Their secularization, of Their insulative control and false synthesis - the "deliberate resurrection" of nature - is sufficient to push Slothrop into anti-paranoia. The realization that the cartel, "the Beast", is real rather than projected prompts Slothrop to opt out finally from Their conspiracy, in acknowledgement of his Preterition. Similarly, Tchitcherine discovers that he has been an unwitting agent of a real, global Rocket-state and that "everyone else seems to be in on it. (...) All except for himself and Enzian"(p.566). However, Enzian too has been

duped by Their false appearances, his quest misdirected, away from the "Real Text" of "Earth's mindbody". The discovery that they have been deceived and used by Them is, for the postmodernist hero, the moment of self-realization.

Lyle Bland's mystical vision of the Earth as a "living critter" is the first of a series of syncretically based images that characterize the final section of the narrative, "The Counterforce". The derivations of images used throughout to distinguish the numinous from the noumenon are disclosed in the manner of archetypes. As in The Faerie Queene, where the Beast, the "damned feend", is revealed to be the archetype of all Redcrosse's enemies, so Slothrop's vision of the rainbow parabola cojoined with Earth is the archetype or langue of all the narrative's mandalic signs. In turn, the pantheistic context within which these signs are located is revealed through the occult magic of Geli Tripping. Like Bland, she discovers that which Their machinations are designed to suppress but which is defined by the Rocket-as-Revealer. Their machinations are most fully disclosed by the interpolated biography of Byron the immortal Bulb. Byron's story is a parable of Their power, setting out "objectively" the cartel conspiracy that the heroes can only apprehend inductively. These "localized" archetypes are drawn together into a kind of Ur-text by the Rocket 00000 and its ritual flight.

The pre-launch countdown offers a figural context in which the Rocket is analogous to the archetypal Tree of Life, drawing signs together in a pattern of mutual rather than conflicting signification, according to the Kabbalistic interpretation of Steve Edelman.

At the Creation (...) God sent out a pulse of energy into the void. It presently branched and sorted into ten distinct spheres or aspects, corresponding to the numbers 1-10. These are

known as the Sephiroth. To return to God, the soul must negotiate each of the Sephiroth, from ten back to one. (...) Now the Sephiroth fall into a pattern, which is called the Tree of Life. It is also the body of God. Drawn among the ten spheres are 22 paths. Each path corresponds to a letter of the Hebrew alphabet, also to one of the cards called "Major Arcana" in the Tarot. So although the Rocket countdown appears to be serial, it actually conceals the Tree of Life, which must be apprehended all at once, together, in parallel (p.753).

The Tree "itself is a unity", but whether the Rocket achieves the return to such a figural unity at the mystical Brennschluss Point is ambiguous. The figural potential of the Rocket as metaphor is balanced by the context in which it is fired. Gottfried is decked in "Deathlace", "the boy's bridal costume"; he is gagged with a white kid glove, "the female equivalent of the Hand of Glory"(p.750); wrapped in an Impolex shroud he is placed in the "Oven" prepared by Blicero. This "deliberate transcendence" is a ritual annihilation; Gottfried is to be sacrificed upon the altar of Blicero's overvaulting pride. So although the Rocket ascends on "a promise, a prophesy, of Escape", it will be "betrayed to Gravity"(p.758).

A conventional allegory would, at this point, typologically invoke its pretext, both to suggest the sacred and to endorse the narrative's disclosure of it. Gravity's Rainbow simply ends. Its conclusion is similar to that of The Confidence-Man: both leave unreconciled conflicting significations of their major tropes. The Cosmopolitan remains both the Antichrist and an angel, the Rocket contains the potential for

both transcendence and annihilation. These conclusions are open-ended in the manner characteristic of allegory but they are not preceded by a partial revelation of the numinous, instead they include ambiguous revelations of opposing archetypes. One of the reasons for Gravity's Rainbow's final ambiguity is the fact that the syncretic construction of these "sacred" archetypes takes place in a space external to the hero's quest. Minor characters contribute to the syncretic process which is then explicated by the narrator. Consequently we are deprived of a single line of development performed by a surrogate-reader. The rhetorical distance between the reader and the narrative quest is therefore widened, transferring much of the burden of making a final judgment on to the reader.

It is however the absence of a clearly defined relationship between the narrative and a sacred pretext that accounts in large part for the modified role of the reader in postmodernist allegory. The plots of V, The Crying of Lot 49 and Gravity's Rainbow are foreshortened because they do not invoke a pretext to conclude the narrative's signification. The Confidence-Man differs in this regard because it is able to invoke a pretext - the Bible and the Apocrypha - although the pretextual relationship is highly qualified. Conventional allegory, as we saw in the first chapter, obliges the reader to make some response to the sacred, a response that is guided by the narrative's interpretation of its pretext. The reader thus (ideally) responds to the invisible, sacred power that informs an entire semiotic system - the allegory, an anterior sacred text and, by extension, a nature-text. The narrative is designed to reawaken an awareness of a sacred language or, rather, the sacred dimension of all signs.

There is no difference between the visible marks  
that God has stamped upon the surface of the

earth, so that we may know its inner secrets, and the legible words that the Scriptures, or the sages of Antiquity, have set down in the books preserved for us by tradition. The relation to these texts is of the same nature as the relation to things: in both cases there are signs to be discovered and then, little by little, made to speak. ... The process is everywhere the same: that of the sign and its likeness, and this is why nature and the word can intertwine with one another to infinity, forming, for those who can read it, one vast single text.<sup>2</sup>

The conventional allegoric hero and, presumably, the reader learn to identify and to read this "vast single text" by rediscovering the significance of a pretextual hermeneutic.

Allegory is not only the interpretation of an anterior text; it is also about the problem of interpretation, of making present to knowledge the allos or allegoria of the world's visibilia. It is about the construction of cryptomorphs. Where in a conventional allegory this construction is presented more as a process of discovery, the alienation of pretext from postmodernist narrative requires that the activity of constructing meaning be confronted. As a genre, allegory calls into question the logic of its construction - the systematic pursuit of a transcendental signifier that underlies the entire narrative and is disclosed in the crisis of its plot. It is this logos that centers the narrative's metaphors, it is the unseen tenor of its tropes. But when no such disclosure occurs it is the reader who must construct a discourse of the Same, a commentary that will limit the otherwise infinite play of narratological signification. As I explained in chapter one,

the shift in narrative focus from the Word to a false logos effectively destroys the narrative's potential to include a figural disclosure or epiphany. When it is the nature of the spiritus infernus to encourage the free play of signification and to oppose coherent epistemological principles then the false logos cannot be invoked to conclude the narrative's own signification. That is, unless the reader chooses to center the narrative's meaning by identifying the satanic as that aspect of the sacred which informs it. Consequently, the response elicited from the reader remains constant despite the historical modification of the allegoric plot; still the reader is engaged in the quest for a transcendental signifier. Postmodernist allegory, because its conclusion is modified, simply requires that the reader make a self-conscious choice between transcendental signifiers.

The thematic structure, generic principle of construction, meta-physical orientation ... that which is projected sequentially by the plot and to which the reader must respond, remains essentially unchanged throughout allegory's history. As historical institutions literary genres are peculiarly akin to the Saussurian model of language. The diachronic structure, the systematic aspect of the genre, could be termed the generic langue, whilst the individual, evolutionary aspect - the synchronically based texts - are the manifestations of parole. The genre as a whole, perhaps because it is nothing but a unique language usage, approximates the nature of language.

Language is at the same time an institution and continually evolving. Langue and parole are interdependent, each supposing the other, instrument and product of the other at the same time. <sup>3</sup>

So Pynchon's narratives are both the products of and a part of the allegoric genre, as the latest in an "evolutionary" sequence of allegoric texts. But whilst they are allegoric in structure, the structure of the allegoria requires that the reader decide whether it is an imposed or providential meaning, a construction or a cryptomorph.

## NOTES

Chapter 1

1. See Robert Scholes, The Fabulators. New York:1967; "Fabulation and Epic Vision"; John O.Stark, The Literature of Exhaustion. Durham:1971; "John Barth".
2. Peter Szondi, New Literary History, 10. (1978). p.18.
3. Mary Carruthers, The Search for St. Truth: A Study of Meaning in Piers Plowman. Evanston:1973. p.4.
4. Maureen Quilligan, The Language of Allegory: Defining the Genre. Ithaca:1979. p.100. Note: The Bible is not the only text available as a pretext. The works of Homer, Virgil and Dante, in addition to popular myths and legends are central to the Western allegoric tradition, as they establish the authority of the literary imagination to render the "sacred".
5. The following discussion of Augustine's conception of language draws upon Mary Carruthers, op.cit. pp.10-16; and Robert E. Meagher, An Introduction to Augustine. New York:1978.
6. Plato describes a similar kind of communication in Phaedrus, Harmondsworth:1981, which is "written on the soul of the hearer together with understanding ... the living and animate speech of a man with knowledge". It is this form of logos which is conveyed in speech, which "names" the allegoric "other" - Ideal Truth - and of which written speech is the shadow. (p.98). Michel Foucault's The Order of Things, London:1977, designates a similar, though ternary, organisation of the sign as characteristic of Renaissance linguistics: "at that time, the theory of the sign implied three quite distinct elements: that

which was marked, that which did the marking, and that which made it possible to see in the first the mark of the second; and this last element was, of course, resemblance"(p.64). But cast in the terminology of Augustine, this idea of resemblance becomes a metaphysical one: the signifier, manifest in the temporal form of resemblance, is the Word. And it is the "inner word" which makes it possible to perceive a signifying relationship between the "mark" and the "marker", because it is informed by the Word: the source of all resemblance. As we shall see later, this notion of seeing "in the first the mark of the second" forms the basis of a figural hermeneutic, applicable not only to language but to historical signs also.

7. See Peter Szondi, op.cit., Joseph A.Mazzeo, "Allegorical Interpretation and History", Comparative Literature, 30. 1. (Winter,1978)., Peter Berek, "Interpretation, Allegory and Allegoresis", College English, 40. (1978).
8. This is an instance of the practice with which Oscar Wilde charged Wordsworth: finding in stones the sermon he had already put there.
9. Gay Clifford, The Transformations of Allegory. London:1974. p.43.
10. Quoted by A.G.Mitchell, "Lady Meed and the Art of Piers Plowman", Style and Symbolism in Piers Plowman. Ed. Robert J.Blanch. Knoxville:1979. p.175.
11. William Langland, The Vision of Piers Plowman: A Complete Edition of the B-text. Ed. A.V.C.Schmidt. London:1978. 11.25-7.  
Note: Future quotations are taken from this edition and line

references will be given parenthetically in the text.

12. Gay Clifford, op.cit. p.9.
13. Northrop Frye, Anatomy of Criticism. Princeton:1957. p.90.
14. Stephen A.Barney, Allegories of History, Allegories of Love Hamden:1979. p.46., cites the example of Thomas Aquinas, "Summa Totius Theologiae".
15. Angus Fletcher, Allegory: The Theory of a Symbolic Mode. Ithaca: 1965. p.220-21.
16. Mary Carruthers, op.cit. p.4.
17. Maureen Quilligan, op.cit. p.42.
18. Walter Benjamin, The Origin of the German Tragic Drama. Trans. John Osbourne. London:1977. p.184.
19. Erich Auerbach, "Figura", Scenes from the Drama of European Literature. Trans. Willard R.Trask. New York:1959. p.49.  
 Note: My use of the term "figura" differs from that of Auerbach in that I do not share his assumption that the figura must have the status of a real, historical event. On the contrary, I assume that historical events can function as figurae because they share the semiotic status of figural signs.
20. Isabel MacCafferey, Spenser's Allegory: The Anatomy of Imagination. Princeton:1976. pp.26-30.
21. Wolfgang Iser, "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction", Aspects of Narrative. Ed. J.Hillis Miller. New York: 1971. p.12.
22. Jonathon Culler, Structuralist Poetics. London:1975. p.224.

23. This is also the case with Donald Barthelme's Snow White, New York:1977; a contemporary, interpretative, reenactment of the fairytale. As Snow White proceeds it reveals its consuming concern with the conditions of its own existence, and mocks any attempt, on the part of the reader, to discover external or referential significance, whether in the original fairytale or in reality. The questionnaire that is inserted at the end of the first part parodies the reader's effort to determine the moral and fictional status of its various characters, in terms of the myth, or "pre-text", by explicitly stating them: thus making the somewhat laborious point that the reader's perceptions, and hence interpretations, have been determined by previous literary conventions. The idea of seeking an alternative reality to the closed system of Snow White is mocked as all forms of possibility are revealed to be aspects of the all-pervasive "trash phenomenon".
24. Maureen Quilligan, op.cit. p.145
25. Julia Kristeva, "Postmodernism?", Bucknell Review: Romanticism, Modernism, Postmodernism. XXV. 2. Ed. Harry R.Garvin. Lewisburg:1980. p.137.
26. From the title of his essay "The Novel and the Experience of Limits", Surfiction: Fiction Now ... and Tomorrow. Ed. Raymond Federman. Chicago:1975.
27. Julia Kristeva, op.cit. p.137.
28. E.D.Hirsch, "Derrida's Axioms", London Review of Books, July 21, 1983. p.17. Hirsch claims that language does not precede ideas but that "object concepts" preexist the names that they are given, citing as his authority Language Acquisition, Ed. Eric

Wanner and Lila Gleitman.

29. See, for instance, Jerome Klinkowitz, "New American Fiction and Values", Anglo-American Studies, II.2. (November, 1982), p.243., and Charles Russell, "The Context of the Concept", Bucknell Review, XXV. 2. (1980), p.191.
30. Edward Mendelson, "Introduction", Pynchon: Twentieth Century Views. Ed. Edward A. Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs: 1978. pp.13-14.
31. Julia Kristeva, op.cit. p.141.
32. ibid. p.140.
33. Dante Alighieri, La Divina Commedia. Ed. and annotated by C.H. Grandgent, revised Charles S. Singleton. Cambridge, Mass.: 1972. "Paradiso", Canto XXXIII. ll.139-45.
- Thither my own wings could not carry me,  
But that a flash my understanding clove,  
Whence its desire came to it suddenly.
- High phantasy lost power and here broke off;  
Yet, as a wheel moves smoothly, free of jars,  
My will and my desire were turned by love,
- The love that moves the sun and the other stars.
- Trans. Dorothy L. Sayers and Barbara Reynolds. 1962; reprint, Harmondsworth: 1969.
34. The sequence of the events of the Apocalypse is drawn from R.W.B. Lewis, Trials of the Word. New Haven: 1965. p.75.
35. Quoted by Jerome Klinkowitz, op.cit. p.243. (Ronald Sukenick)
36. Steven Weisenburger, "The End of History? Thomas Pynchon and

- the Uses of the Past", Twentieth Century Literature, 25. (1979). p.63.
37. ibid. p.63.
38. Thomas Pynchon, "Entropy", Kenyon Review, 22. (Spring,1960). p.278. Note: Future quotations are taken from this publication and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
39. See Erwin N.Hiebert, "The Uses and Abuses of Thermodynamics in Religion", Daedalus, (Fall,1966). pp.1046-80., which collects a number of responses to the problematic relationship between science and religion, from theologians, philosophers and scientists.
40. ibid. Quoted p.1055-56.
41. The Education of Henry Adams. New York:1931. pp.382,383.

## Chapter 2

1. Thomas Pynchon, V. 1963; reprint, London:1978. p.10. Note: Future quotations are taken from this edition and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
2. Thomas H.Schaub, Pynchon: The Voice of Ambiguity. Urbana, Chicago and London:1981. pp.3-18.
3. William Plater, The Grim Phoenix. Bloomington,Ind. and London: 1978. p,xiii.
4. David Richter, Fable's End. Chicago:1974. p.104.
5. R.W.B.Lewis, op.cit. p.228.
6. Richard Patteson, Critique, 16. 2. (1974). p.31.

7. William Plater, op.cit. pp.142-49. This aspect of V. appears also in Gravity's Rainbow, in the character of Greta Erdmann who neurotically conceives of herself as "... the Shekhinah, queen, daughter, bride and mother of God"(p.478).
8. Thomas Pynchon, The Crying of Lot 49. 1966; reprint, New York: 1978. p.44. Note: Future quotations are taken from this edition and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
9. Mary Carruthers, op.cit. p.4.
10. William Plater, op.cit. p.143.
11. ibid. p.143.
12. Richard Patteson, op.cit. p.36.
13. William Plater, op.cit. p.145.
14. Gravity's Rainbow. London:1973. p.664. Note: Future quotations are taken from this edition and page references will be given parenthetically in the text.
15. David Richter, op.cit. p.127.
16. Richard Patteson, op.cit. p.42.

### Chapter 3

1. Peter Abernathy, "Entropy in Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49", Critique, 14. 2. (1972). p.19.
2. Noted by Maureen Quilligan, op.cit. p.43.
3. Quoted by Edward Mendelson, "The Sacred, the Profane and The

Crying of Lot 49", Pynchon. Ed. Mendelson. Englewood Cliffs:  
1978. p.122.

4. It is as if Redcrosse were to slay his dragon - the "damned feend" - only to discover in it a Triffid-like quality, whereby each of its severed limbs would take on a life of its own and so rise in unison against him, to continue the battle ad infinitum.
5. Jaroslav Černý, Journal of Egyptian Archeology, 34. (1948). p.121. Note: This discussion of Thoth draws upon Černý, ibid., and Jacques Derrida, Dissemination. London:1981. pp.86-92. It is interesting to note that, in V, the spy Bongo-Shaftsbury makes his initial appearance in the guise of Horus. See V, p.74.
6. Jacques Derrida, ibid. p.86.
7. I do not wish to suggest that Mr Thoth is in any way a "dramatisation" of the Egyptian god. He represents an old man, but one who bears a typologically significant name; who introduces to the narrative's field of signification all of the nuances and associations which attach to Thoth and the Egyptian religious tradition. Thus, he extends the exegetical context within which the rest of the narrative is read - and casts the preceding episodes in a different light - by providing a pretextual antecedent, of which The Crying of Lot 49 can be seen as an interpretation, a re-enactment, in modern terms.
8. Jacques Derrida, op.cit. p.92.
9. ibid. p.87.
10. ibid. p.89.

11. Christopher Norris, Deconstruction: Theory and Practice. London:1982. p.37.
12. Jacques Derrida, op.cit. p.93.
13. James Nohrnberg, "Pynchon's Paraclete", Mendelson(Ed.), op.cit. p.149.
14. Also noted by Thomas Schaub, op.cit. p.25.
15. Michel Foucault, The Order of Things. London:1977. p.41.
16. ibid. p.49.
17. George Steiner, "Introduction", Walter Benjamin, op.cit. p.14.

#### Chapter 4

1. In contrast to the preceding discussions of V and The Crying of Lot 49, this chapter does not attempt a "totalised" reading of the text. Given the complex exfoliations of Gravity's Rainbow, some of which bear a tangential relation to the argument presented here - that of the nature of the postmodernist allegoric hero - my observations are in the most part restricted to the characters of Slothrop, Enzian and Tchitcherine.
2. Mary Carruthers, op.cit. p.4.
3. Immanuel Kant, Critique of Pure Reason. "The Ground of Distinction of all Objects in General into Phenomena and Noumena", The European Philosophers from Descartes to Nietzsche. Ed. Monroe C.Beardsley. New York:1960. p.412.
4. Pynchon's ellipses; henceforth mine are given in parenthesis.
5. The relationship of Puritan theology to the allegoric genre

becomes apparent in this shared assumption of the world-as-metaphor. Allegory, like Puritan "Nature", is a metaphoric discourse constantly striving to become symbolic, to manifest and make present to our knowledge a "transcendental signifier".

6. That is, film possesses a greater potential to portray a so-called "slice of life" than does any other "art" medium, a potential parodically disclosed by films like Andy Warhol's Empire (1964): an eight-hour camera's eye-view of the Empire State Building. The static camera performs a perceptive function, simply recording "reality", so that its projective role is correspondingly obscured. This project stands in sharp contrast to a movie like Alfred Hitchcock's Rear Window (1954) in which the camera itself is performative or, more accurately, homological. It is actively involved in "making" the narrative, in a manner that parallels the audience's own involvement in the construction of an implied mystery-meaning, and so can create an "alienating" effect that focuses on a self-reflexive awareness of the meaning-making faculty, but turns upon the alternative function: that of engrossing the audience further in the mystery of meaning-making.
7. Tom Robbins, Still Life With Woodpecker. New York:1980. p.86.
8. Richard Poirier, "Rocket Power", Mendelson (Ed.). op.cit. p.171.
9. Michel Foucault, op.cit. p.49.
10. Jacques Derrida, op.cit. p.87.
11. ibid. p.183.
12. The "doctrine of immaculate perception" from Joseph Slade, "Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in Gravity's Rainbow",

Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow. Ed. Charles Clerc. Columbus, Ohio:1983. p.183.

13. John Barth, Giles Goat-Boy. 1966; reprint, London:1981. pp.63-4.
14. Edmund Spenser, The Faerie Queene. Ed. A.C.Hamilton. London and New York:1977; corrected reprint,1980. I.ix.6.
15. Joseph Slade, op.cit. p.183.
16. "Passive discursivity" coined by K.K.Ruthven, "The Critic Without Qualities". (Unpublished seminar paper,1984)

#### Chapter 5

1. I imagine the allegoric structure of Gravity's Rainbow as analogous to what The Faerie Queene would be if all of its various quests were to be included in a single Book, forming a kind of narratological palimpsest in which all the writing is legible, additional quest-texts simply being superimposed upon the original.
2. Michel Foucault, op.cit. pp.33-4.
3. David Carroll, The Subject in Question: The Languages of Theory and the Strategies of Fiction. Chicago and London:1982. p.141.

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